Barry Lopez: Contemplating Change in Alaska

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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Iowa School of Letters announces the 1983

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award for short fiction

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Submission

Manuscripts should be mailed to:

Iowa School of Letters Award for Short Fiction
Department of English
English-Philosophy Building
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

No application forms are necessary. Entries for the 1983 competition should be submitted between August 1, 1982, and September 30, 1982. Announcement of the winner will be made early in 1983.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Strictly speaking, this is the NAR's 167th Anniversary Issue, though—like the organizers of class reunions—we make much of the event only in fifth years. Nevertheless we celebrate the Old North's latest birthday with sufficient gifts: a marvelously sentimental interview with Henry Chapin, conducted by spring chickens E.M. Broner and Paul Pines, in which the poet voices his "suspicions" about love and women and the business of being alive; a treatise on owls by Scott Sanders, whose essays in future will alternate here with those of David Hellerstein; a considerable disquisition on the state of American literary publishing by George Garrett—it turns out to have a "we have met the enemy and he is us" thesis; and a giddy look at continuing customs of a California which "is geologically not a part of North America at all," by Thomas Bass. Leading off this month is a discussion of difficulties facing Alaskan Eskimos, especially concerning traditional hunting rights, written—and photographed—by Barry Lopez.

All this in addition to some quite marvelous short stories, brief appreciations of George Orwell and Glenway Wescott, and even, here and there, a poem. Oh, we've had worse birthdays—and we promise not to let the Administration's Armageddon posture spoil this one, even while we brood over the Reagans' affable contempt for most of the things that make America beautiful.

FURTHER NOTES:

In April, the *North American Review* will publish *A Lot for the Money*, a collection of stories, poems, and essays by NAR contributing editor Kenneth Lash. The book, a paperback to retail at $6.95, is available through this magazine or at your local bookseller's. Most of its contents first appeared in this magazine.

Winter Count, the short story collection by Barry Lopez (another of our contributing editors, and the author of this issue's lead essay), has received the Distinguished Recognition Award of the Friends of American Writers. The book is published by Scribner's.

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★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

REVIEW

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The California Unconscious

Triangles

Santa Cruz is the Bermuda Triangle of cosmic consciousness. People wander into the area's vibrations and disappear forever. Unless one finds them later dancing with sufis, sitting zazen, or practicing tantric or one of the five other yogas. A mere ninety miles south of San Francisco, the Santa Cruz Mountains are filled with spiritual seekers afloat in sensory deprivation tanks, elevated on *amanita muscaria*, tuned into theta waves, stoned with the Rastafarians, and rolfed into proper alignment. Employed are not one but hundreds of handbooks to higher consciousness.

A friend of mine, a former secretary at the University, recently joined the tantric yogis and dyed all her clothing orange. Suddenly I noticed orange people everywhere. Among the other spiritual adepts dressed for salvation, I had simply overlooked them. But here all around me were dozens of orange people, my friend among them, on the verge of enthusiastic possession!

Santa Cruz is already bunked in for the millenium. There are enough mandalas, rainbows, astrologers, cultists, and chanters to convince anyone that the New Age is about to sweep clean the historical stage. The town has a Lewis and Clark expedition down every path to salvation. One simply has to choose which of the Golden Ways to follow.

One day another friend placed on her dresser the picture of "her" guru. In the snap of two visitations she had gone from inquiring soul to devotee. Later she showed me the candlelit shrine she had made in her closet. Here she meditated twice a day before another picture of her guru.

She made no decisions in her life without consulting him. When ghosts began visiting her at night she moved into his ashram. She ate only vegetables and rice, and whenever I saw her the conversation turned invariably to the subject of physical and psychic purgatives. But just as suddenly this was overthrown—mantras, gurus, assanas, and all—when my friend moved out of the ashram and took up massage.

Thomas Mann describes similar preoccupations in *The Magic Mountain*. Hans Castorp travels to a sanitarium in the mountains above Lake Constance. It is a place of great beauty, a beauty profound enough to heal tuberculosis and other physical disorders. On his arrival, Castorp exclaims over the nature that surrounds him. But by the end of the book he too has succumbed to ghostly visitations and hypochondria. The only view that now interests him is the x-ray that he keeps on his dresser of Clavdia Chauchat's diseased lungs.

Like Mann's sanitarium, life in Santa Cruz has been engineered for the maintenance of health. There are Birkenstock sandals for proper posture, hot tubs for improved circulation, and macrobiotic fruit juice vegetarian organic no chocolate or sugar diets for longevity. While taking his temperature a dozen times a day, Castorp loses sight of his environs. In Santa Cruz the temperature taking is psychic, but the monitoring is no less strict. Here too nature has given way to etiology.

Going Native

When I first moved to Santa Cruz it was the pastoral and mediterranean that overwhelmed me. Half the flowers I had never seen before: ceonothus, bottlebrush, bougainvillea. There was pollen in the air. It went to my head. Here was a town lazed against mountains covered with stands of redwood and meadows that turned from winter green to summer brown under skies that were not cloudy all day, although they might be foggy in the morning, until the mist burned off and the sun reappeared over an azure, indeed pacific ocean.

By then it was time to stroll down the Pacific Garden Mall, a street lined with jacarandas and flower beds where the walk from bookstore to cafe was accompanied always by the sound of flutes and street balladeers. Clothing was scant. The women wholesome, white-toothed, and blonde. It was a Rousseau painting, a dreamscape where one could recline on red couches under palm fronds to dream the golden dream.

Time here is thickened into uniformity, an aspect of a climate that registers little of seasons, where spring, for instance, lasts from February first to the dog days of summer. But as a newcomer I initially had the knack of taking this seamless time and speeding it up, so that friendships, romances, entire lives could be telescoped into a matter of days. With everything succulent and ready at hand, I could traverse from first sight to life stories, true love, waning interest, boredom, and back out on the street again in no time.

My friends said that I lacked discrimination. That was the point. To embrace the Dionysian consciousness that does not negate anymore. To eliminate boundaries. Suspend judgment. Merge self with other in a ceaseless yes.

I wanted to fit in. Go with the flow. But there were several flows to go with. Which style would I embrace first? Redwood man, mountain mellow, cafe sport, surf dandy? In a few months, by saying yes in rapid succession, I had mastered them all.

First I moved to the redwoods and bought a pickup truck. I swung with the woodsy crowd that dances country stomp on weekends and does a bit of everything manual during the week. The fast money was in burl—redwood stumps that one hauls out of the forests and sells to tourists from San Jose who prefer it above all else for making coffee tables.

Pickup trucks in the Santa Cruz Mountains are incomplete without a) a girl in front and b) a dog in back. I was fast on my way to getting both when the truck broke down. It was too dark in the redwoods anyway. Forests, as everyone knows, are where wolves and badguys live.

I sold the truck, bought a Plymouth Valiant, and moved back into town, where I favored the dual life of beach bum by day and existentialist by night. Surfers and the suntan set frequent the free beaches on the north coast of Santa Cruz County,

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"free" meaning you can lie on them naked and not get hassled by anything more than sand flies.

You have your choice of empty coves or stretches of sand filled with tanning bodies and courtship rituals. The last being too strenuous for me, I stayed supine and tried for something more Hindu: the Sabbath of Eternity, the empty-headedness of John Lilly afloat in his samadhi tank.

Mentation resumed by night as I joined the cafe set carrying volumes of Hegel under their arms, or *The Ecology of Mind, Co-Evolution Quarterly,* and *Love's Body.* The Santa Cruz scene is not to be confused with Saint-Germain or the Village. Chess is played without clocks. The neo-Hegelians are neither of the right or left. They reside in a vague, hip, mellow middle which offers a ruthless critique of everything existing, except for the great mundaneity of life in Santa Cruz.

I was getting savvy by then. Learning the finer points of a California lifestyle. I sold the Plymouth, bought a Triumph, and moved to a meadowed stretch of mountain called Bonny Doon. Here I lived the rural idyll in a redwood cabin with skylights and a sleeping loft. Heat came from an Ashley stove, two cats, and a wood-burning sauna just out the front door. Next to the sauna was a large redwood tank for swimming. The cats and I stared for hours at the goldfish glinting in its waters. If this was a branch office of Valhalla, I had no interest in visiting headquarters.

But the cabin got sold, sports cars proved beyond my means, and I found myself back in *centre ville* parking a Toyota in front of a duplex. I had to rehabilitate myself, function again in the world after having emerged from the great halfway house of easy living. I worked day by day to get my attention span up from three and a half minutes. I struggled to reacquire the use of comparative adjectives. I amazed myself the first time I said *no.* I took advantage of foggy mornings to relearn how to sit in a chair. I tried for several hours a day to keep myself inside and out from under the great sundrenched bathysphere of the Santa Cruz sky. For once out there, I was like a member of AA going blotto into his second drink.

I settled down to the life of a California resident. Not a citizen. Just a resident. Even today I still suffer palpitations when hearing about tropical hideaways and the really easy life. Like other residents, I am ready to move off always and forever to the something next which titillates our projective minds and spares the moment from unrelieved boredom.

Indians

The Santa Cruz coast is less dramatic than Big Sur to the south, where the Santa Lucia Mountains tumble precipitously into the ocean. But even the lower slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains can assert themselves as a presence to be reckoned with. This past January, for instance, the winter storms raging in off the Pacific were more demonstrative than most. Chunks of mountain slipped onto roads and houses, while rivers engorged themselves overnight to become great headwalls of brown detritus. Hundreds of people set to work afterwards digging mud out of their living rooms, except for those who no longer had living rooms, and by then many people had been reminded of basic truths in geography and theology—that you don't build your house on mountainsides, flood plains, river beds, or sand.

The Santa Cruz coast is usually discreet about its charms. The beaches are placid along Monterey Bay, while to the north lies a rockier, less populated coast that fronts directly on the Pacific. Paths zigzag down its orange and yellow cliffs to arrive at coves, tide pools, and a wonderful array of caves and bridges carved out of sedimentary rock.

For ten thousand years these shores were the happy preserve of the Ohlone Indians, so named after their favorite totemic food—*ohlone* being a variant spelling of *abalone,* that succulent gastropod whose iridescent shell used to festoon the rocks here in great abundance. The Ohlone practiced no agriculture and raised no domestic animals. Their economy was biotechnic, which means they dined out of the tide pools.

They were the area's first sunbathers. They lived on the dunes in lean-tos constructed of stakes covered with bundles of straw. When the fleas became too abundant, the structures were burned and new ones built farther down the beach. It took two hours to build an Ohlone lean-to.

They cooked their food, when they cooked it, by a process known as stone boiling, in which hot rocks are lowered into woven baskets full of water. After sifting through kitchen midden mounds, anthropologists have reconstructed the following Ohlone recipe for bouillabaisse. Take a large wicker basket and fill it with water. Add hot rocks and the following ingredients:

California mussel
black turban
shell limpet
littleneck clam
purple-hinged scallop
olivella
red abalone
black abalone
barnacles
large sea snails
sea urchins
crab claws
snapper, cod, cabezone, etc.
mossy chiton
gumboot chiton
purple sea urchin tests
sea otter

Stir occasionally. Season to taste. Serve with tanbark oak acorns as a side dish. Eat while lounging on the beach. An unbeatable party favorite.

This latter-day Eden was interrupted by the arrival of the Spanish, who sighted land at Año Nuevo in 1603, although it took them another century and a half to disembark. Included in their baggage, when it finally arrived, were concepts such as años, nuevos, and, most potent of all, sin. The Ohlone, for the betterment of their souls, were soon gathered into missions and set to work toiling in the fields.

Where previously there had been a barter economy built on the trading of abalone, the new Spanish economy was built on the trading of Ohlone. They went so cheaply that everyone had at least one or two around the house. As Richard Dana wrote in *Two Years Before the Mast,* "The Indians, as I have said before, do all the hard work, two or three of them being attached to each house; and the poorest persons are able to keep one, at least, for they have only to feed them."

When the white man hit the beach, he just kept on coming. Successive waves of them can barely be distinguished: mission fathers, trappers, miners, cattlemen, whalers, loggers, orchardists, vineyardists, Jaycees, clerk typists, university professors, computer engineers, word processors, fast food counter girls. Eleven thousand Ohlone were on hand when the Spanish first arrived. By the 1910 census they were, as one says of certain exotic

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species, extinct. So much for the biotechnic life.

Split Brain Theory

It is said that there are two Californias, north and south. Somewhere below Big Sur is the Maginot line that divides the state in half. This division can also be compared to that of the cerebellum, where each hemisphere of the brain is believed to have its own discreet functions. The social schizophrenia from which California suffers—a rabid right and a crazy left—can be diagnosed as the psychosis resulting from a breakdown in communication between the right and left hemispheres. Such impaired communication induces excitability, bizarre behavior, and paranoia. California is one of the world's schizoid greats—right up there with Seth, Sybil, and Jack the Ripper.

Santa Cruz itself displays in microcosm the state's overall schizophrenia. The balance in local elections teeters perennially between conservationists and the real estate lobby. One side or the other squeaks by with a handful of votes and then often has to face a recall election, which it loses. All the distinct characteristics of north and south—their differing styles in dress, architecture, and paranoia—are snuggled up in Santa Cruz into one promiscuous embrace.

As one expects of a car culture, Santa Cruz does not have a traditional downtown. Downtowns in California are a matter of density. With enough neon, parking lots, and haciendac arches, it begins to *feel* like a downtown. It is a matter of compaction and resonance. Downtowns possess a thicker sound than outlying areas. Santa Cruz has two such densifications. North and south. Right brain and left.

Downtown north includes the tree and flower-lined mall. It is a pastoral affair, with street musicians and bare feet, cappucino and walk-in banking. Downtown south is motorland, with Sears, fast food chains, and drive-in banking. Last year, for the first time, its sales outgrossed those of downtown north, which is plagued by what are described as Problems on the Mall. Drifters and bad vibrations have got in among the flutes and bare feet. The radical chic of the 1960s has begun to look like plain old poverty.

Duplex Life

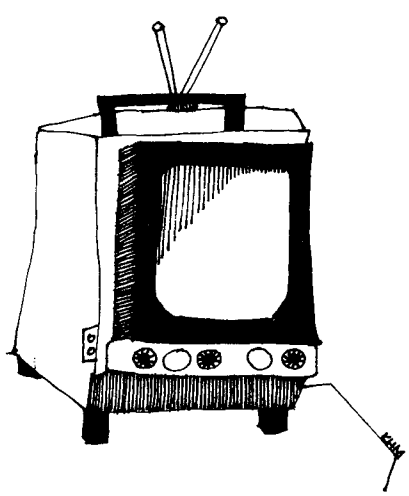
I live in a duplex, a one story apartment linked at the garage to its mate. We stare at an identical set of apartments across a common driveway. This symmetry in a mirror used to unnerve me, but now the twins are so easily distinguished that I never think of mixing up their identities.

The driveway defines our immediate neighborhood, where I, after four years' tenure, am the longest continuing resident. Ruth used to be. She was an eighty-five year old Christian Scientist who drove off for daily airings in her Rambler American. She grew vegetables and roses behind her house and could often be seen taking tea in her garden. But the upkeep got to be too much for her, and a few months ago she sold both her units and moved into a trailer park.

An out-of-town speculator bought the property, and now two Nez Percé Indians and many more students live there. The Indians drive pickup trucks. The students Volkswagens and motorcycles. The history of the apartment adjacent to mine is more complex.

Teri and Nick lived there when I first moved in. He worked for the phone company and drove a yellow Corvette, until he sold it and bought a Dodge van. Teri drove a gold Cadillac and stayed home to watch soap operas and take care of Barry, Nick's four year old child by his first marriage. She, at twenty-four, was three years older than Nick.

Teri was very smart and very bored. Nick worked a lot on the van, installing skylights and wall-to-wall carpeting and a toilet. Sometimes they drove to van-ins over in the Santa Clara Valley or up in the Sierras. It can take years to get a van ready for the finishing touches. When you complete the interior, the windows, and all the outside fittings—wind skirts, antennae, mirrors, chrome—only then do you apply paint. The van gets sanded, primed, enameled with several coats, and finally airbrushed with metal-flake pictures of mountains and sunsets. Nick had a way to go before his van was ready to paint.



One day Teri told me they were in trouble. She and Nick had just watched a TV special on wife beating, where they learned for the first time that that was their problem. "It was weird seeing your life right there on TV," she said. She made Nick see a therapist and then he took up with another woman and finally they got divorced and both moved away.

Linda and Judy took over the apartment. Linda worked in the public schools as a speech therapist and drove an Alfa Romeo, until it got repossessed by the bank. Judy drove an old Opel and an even older Ford van. She worked as a fireman on the Southern Pacific Railroad out of Watsonville. Linda was blonde and quiet. Judy was dark and loquacious. They said they were far happier as a lesbian couple than they had ever been with their former husbands.

Linda cooked and Judy fixed the cars. On weekends they gave quiet dinner parties for their friends. Things got complicated when they met Georgette and formed a triad. "My therapist says triads are the most stable form of love relationship," Judy told me. Georgette lived in San Francisco, and there was a lot of commuting up and down the coast until Linda and Judy decided to move up to the City. I helped them tie their mattress on top of the van.

"How's it going?" I asked Judy.

"Things are a little rocky and kind of complex," she said. "It's sometimes hard to keep track of where we're at."

Jeff and Amy moved in next. He drove a Toyota truck and worked as a solar contractor. She drove a Datsun sedan. She was a weaver who cleaned and spun her own wool. She also dried flowers and arranged them and sometimes took care of Jeff's two children from his former marriage, who were named something like Raindrop and Sunshine. Jeff and Amy had met the previous summer

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when he hired her to look after the children. Now that they were married he didn't pay her anymore, and she wondered if he should.

One day Amy asked if she could plant a garden in the patch of ground in front of my apartment. She bought a truckload of soil and compost and dumped it in the yard. She dug a large bed, mulched it carefully, and planted marigolds around the border to keep the snails away. But before she could plant any more flowers or vegetables, Jeff had found another house to rent outside of town and they moved away.

Jackie and Beth are the latest tenants. Jackie drives an orange Honda Civic and works as a legal secretary. Beth drives a brown Honda Civic and waitresses at a restaurant on the wharf. Jackie sometimes puts on her bikini and sunbathes in the driveway. She props herself against the garage, where the metal door and concrete driveway can roast you even in December. The last time I saw her sunbathing I stopped to talk. She said she was bored. There were blue lines under her eyes and she told me it was serious this time.

"What would you do if you could do anything?" I asked.

"Go to Hawaii," she said. And then, after a pause, "The last time I went to Hawaii it was too crowded and too expensive and not much fun.

"Live on the beach," she said next. "Oh, I guess I've already done that, and it gets tiring after a while. You get fed up with sand in your bed."

She thought again. "Maybe go to the mountains, where I can take off my clothes and no one will care."

This is the dream life of California. The significant other: Hawaii, the beach, the mountains, hanging out, doing nothing. But you go to Hawaii or the beach, and it *is* like doing nothing, so that the boredom is serious. Fantasy materializes as the everyday. Dream life is routinized. The California unconscious opens into no secret gardens; its other is insignificant. Shimmering on its horizon are successive landscapes in a white hot vacuum.

The Economy

In the 1950s Santa Cruz was dead on its feet. Half the town was retired and the other half felt like it. The only place in the country with a higher percentage of grey bears was St. Petersburg, Florida. You could cruise the Boardwalk for action and not find any at all.

The Silicon Valley—our indigenous Singapore that stretches from Palo Alto to San Jose—lies only thirty miles to the east of Santa Cruz. But the Coast Range provides a natural barrier between the artichoke fields and the chip factories, or at least it did for a while. Now there is a four lane, although still treacherous, highway carved over the mountains, and nearly a quarter of the local wage earners commute over to the Valley and back.

At eight in the morning, up on the ridges, there is the steady whine of Porsches cruising north to Palo Alto, BMWs heading for Sunnyvale, and Toyotas snaking down to San Jose. Parts of the county have doubled in population over the past ten years, while its assessed value has doubled in the past five years. The average selling price of a house last week was 137,000 dollars.

On first arriving in Santa Cruz on Highway 1, I stopped at a gas station that doubled as a health food store. You could fill 'er up and buy your bean sprouts at the same time. Later they phased out the gas pumps and went all the way into organic produce. Now on that particular corner there is a bank. One can observe here the social history of Santa Cruz, its Three Ages of Man. From gas guzzlers to carrot cake and on to money market certificates in ten brief years.

No-Care Lawns

I live on the west side of Santa Cruz, near the spit of land that divides Monterey Bay from the Pacific. Off that point is a stretch of water known to aficionados as Steamer Lane, one of the best surf breaks on the coast. This is a beach community gone permanent. A polyglot of wood frame houses, bungalows, cottages, duplexes. The look is summer sun bleached, oceanic pastel. There should be sand underfoot.

There is instead that strange phenomenon, the no-care lawn. These are yards made of colored rocks—red and white being most favored—that are raked into geometric designs and accented with dwarf evergreens, miniature waterwheels, and birdbaths with artificial birds.

For ease of maintenance, the stones are separated by wooden or metal dividers into discreet beds, one color to a bed. A red rock may stray into a white zone, or vice versa, although in a tended yard such displacement is unacceptable. Weed suppression is managed by a sheet of plastic laid under the rocks. Problems develop, though, when the plastic deteriorates. It shreds and sticks up between the rocks like shoots of black alfalfa. Weeds then appear.

No-care lawns require more attention than their name implies. But they are still considered, given the laws of entropy, a good deal. Real estate agents advertise them as a plus, along with AEKs, hot tubs, sun decks, car ports, and dramatic ocean views.

The aborigines of Australia carry stones on which are inscribed the meaning of the cosmos. These *alchuringa,* as they are called, have drawn on them in geometric patterns the elaborate design of one's fate. They are readable texts, some of which are so potent that they have to be hidden in the desert from all eyes except those of the initiated.

In Santa Cruz the inquiring ethnographer also turns to the reading of stones. They make visible the local cosmology, its search for order in the heavens and on earth. In their arrangement one sees how nature has been standardized and processed. The new culture of rocks allows only for the appearance of nature denatured (in the form of dwarf boxwood and evergreens clipped into triangles). Emphasized in the *alchuringa* of no-care lawns is geometry, precision, regularity, standardization, uniformity, and a great yearning for the absence of time.

The Fault

In 1791 the Franciscan friars founded the Misión de la Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz on the north bank of the San Lorenzo River, which falls precipitously out of the redwoods before lazying down to the wide-bottomed wash alongside of which lies the belated town of Santa Cruz. The mission fathers brought with them hoes, pumpkin seeds, and history. Theirs are the first records of Indian and other doings along the San Lorenzo.

Earthquakes were among the earliest of these memorable events. In the fall of 1800 the ground shook for twenty days, while farther south along the Pajaro River the earth opened up into huge cracks. Other

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significant tremors followed in 1838, 1856, and 1906. The last of these left San Francisco in smoldering ruins.

There are several hundred quakes a year, but most of the earth shaking is not news. In the largest of these, buildings sway and a loud booming comes from the bowels of the earth. Several minutes later the aftershock arrives, which is usually more prolonged than the original quake. Then one goes back to sleep or continues the conversation. There is even a certain fondness here for natural, as opposed to artificial, disasters. Power plant meltdowns are an obscenity, while earthquakes and volcanoes are greeted as geological phenomena. When Mt. Saint Helens erupted, a local movie theater screened a weekend of volcano movies.

It is only since the 1960s that plate tectonics and continental drift have been adopted as the geophysical paradigm. But Californians have quickly become savvy to the language of faults and lithospheric migration. The lithosphere, or hard outer layer of the earth, is divided into approximately seven major and twelve smaller plates that in turn float on a molten asthenosphere. There are big doings whenever these plates drift into each other. You get the Himalayan Mountains, for instance, which are a kind of geological thumbprint marking a collision between the northward moving Indian plate and the stolid Eurasian plate.

The San Andreas fault marks the slippage along two other plates, the Pacific and the North American. The fault extends vertically twenty miles into the earth and is only the largest of an intricate network of faults that runs for 600 miles from the Gulf of California to the Oregon border. The Pacific plate migrates northward two inches a year, and has so far displaced itself 350 miles from its original position. This means that thirty million years ago Monterey Bay was somewhere off the coast of Mexico.

The center of the North American plate is New York City. The center of the Pacific plate lies west of Hawaii. The sliver of coastal California along the San Andreas fault is actually the eastern edge of the Pacific plate, out of which spring the South Sea islands. It is geologically not part of North America at all.

The fault is visible as a suture across the sand in the north, a slippage of earth on the escarpment to the east, a crack in the curb and bowed houses down in Hollister. All roads out of the county cross it.

Sacrifice

Ronald Reagan was reëlected in 1970 to a second term as Governor of California. In order to balance the budget, one of his campaign promises, he closed four of the five state hospitals in northern California with psychiatric facilities. The inmates wandered out to the Greyhound bus terminals in San Francisco and Oakland, to skid rows, parks, and other public places. Two of them who had bounced in and out of psychiatric wards throughout their lives, and who now had no choice but to remain at large, came to Santa Cruz. Their names were Herbert Mullin and Edward Kemper.

Herbert Mullin was a paranoid schizophrenic who subsequently killed thirteen people. Voices told him to "sing the die song," which meant finding the sacrificial victims necessary to keep California from falling into the sea. "I am the scapegoat for my generation," he said, and explained that it was all written in the Book of Jonah.

Thirteen murders. The mystical number. Twelve plus one. With the police closing in on him, Mullin had to find the last victim in a hurry. A seventy-two year old man who used to live three blocks from me and who had the misfortune that day to be out working in his yard. The other victims included a woman dissected for the purpose of anatomical research and a priest killed in his confessional. "This minor natural disaster averts a major natural disaster," said Mullin. "We have to chip in, so to speak, to the darkness . . ."

Edward Kemper was psychologically less complex than Herbert Mullin, although at the age of fourteen he had killed his grandparents, been sent to a state mental hospital, and then paroled on his twenty-first birthday. His notoriety came later, though, when he picked up six female hitchhikers and dissected them while committing acts of necrophilia. He finally bludgeoned his mother to death with a hammer, decapitated her, and stuffed her in a closet.

During the time that Kemper and Mullin were on the loose, the murder rate per one hundred thousand quintupled in Santa Cruz. For a brief time it led the nation in homicides.

Herbert Mullin when arrested was a slight, intense man, age twenty-five. Edward Kemper, two years younger than Mullin, was a bear of a fellow at six feet nine inches, 285 pounds. When they were transferred for safety to the San Mateo County Jail, someone had the perverse idea of putting them in adjacent cells. Mullin loathed Kemper, considering him a sex-crazed, immoral animal. Kemper, on the other hand, thought that Mullin was a nut, a fairy, a "creep with no class." Each volunteered privately to inform on the incriminating lunacy of the other.

The Muse

Robinson Jeffers' "Advice to Pilgrims" arriving at Monterey Bay:

> Walk on gaunt shores and avoid the people; rock
> and waves are good prophets

Jeffers also wrote the line about

> This coast crying out for tragedy
> like all beautiful places

William Everson, the former Brother Antoninus and another local poet, glossed Jeffers' line in a recent interview: "It's almost as if the stretch of the consciousness and of sensibility that a powerful region exerts make people behave in unstable ways. And out of this instability the natural flaw in human nature produces a violence that erupts. . . . the west coast is really an end stop with no resolution."

The area has been a writer's haven ever since Jeffers enstoned himself in Tor House and Steinbeck walked the Monterey piers. The living literati include Peter Beagle, William Everson, Robert Heinlein, George Hitchcock, James Houston, and Page Stegner. There are reports that Thomas Pynchon picks up his mail in Aptos, a town halfway between Santa Cruz and the county line.

Santa Cruz used to hold a yearly poetry festival, a clan gathering of former residents and the spiritually affined who would flex their egos in front of an SRO crowd at the Civic Auditorium. It was a great upswelling of underground *geist*, of bards coming to voice their contrarity to the dominant culture. The two-night marathon brought to town the likes of Robert Bly, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and the rest of the City Lights crowd.

The event became a bit predicta-

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ble after a while, with performers looking like fetishistic representatives of their personae. Ferlinghetti produced long poetic lines full of Christological junk, Burroughs took us *ad astra* through dope crazed delusions, and Bukowsky got drunk and fell off the stage. There were redemptive moments, though. The time for instance when Ginsberg played his shruti box and extemporized while the audience filed out for a bomb threat. "I loved it," says Everson of the former festival. "I just loved the moment on the platform. The more hyenas I could hear yelling out there the better I responded."

Pyramids

Santa Cruz is big into pyramids. There used to be a store that sold them—small ones to sharpen razor blades and larger ones to sit under for focusing brain waves. Pyramids are triangles in three (or four) dimensional space. The Bermuda Triangle laid over Santa Cruz might actually be a great pyramid of cosmic consciousness.

Recently a spate of pyramid schemes overran the area. By making yourself a link in the Great Chain of Gold you could multiply your money tenfold, or more! To keep the chain supplied with links, people threw pyramid parties, and for a while they were a big hit. They were anti-entropic, mystical gatherings where money bred like planaria. Chop it in half and, voilà, you have two of the same.

The next fad to arrive in town had the wonderful name of Prosperity Consciousness. A lot of people, it seems, are ready to bring their consciousness down from the cosmos to capitalism. Technicians of the sacred are being retooled to deal with real estate speculation. The rigors of spiritual practice can now be applied to maintaining an investment portfolio. Out of the ashrams and into the banks. It's an old story going back to the Middle Ages. Read Max Weber on prosperity consciousness.

I used to think there were two competing cultures on this rim of the Pacific plate: the Success Culture and the Salvation Culture, and that they were running neck and neck in attracting either entrepreneurs or visionaries. But I have since located the key to their identity, the principle of conversion that translates one mode into the other. The great dialectical synthesis is consciousness.

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Cash flow, in this view, is a manifestation of mind. It requires its own spiritual practice. It maintains its own network of gurus and mantras. One examines not an economy, but a psycho-economy. The bottom line is money-thought, cash-will, prosperity consciousness.

This consciousness manifests itself in the lifestyle that accompanies it. Money-thought converts into money-style. You want a Porsche mantra in the first place because you like the style of Porsches. There are dozens of psycho-economic styles to choose from—the disposable, the pastoral, the counter-cultural, the hip. There is also the pervasive belief, rather like the Hindu idea of castes, that one occupies a certain socio-economic stratum out of volition, because one has willed or prepared oneself for that stratum. The only difference being that in Santa Cruz, unlike India, one does not have to die in order to whiz up or down the ladder.

The psycho-economy is also like Hinduism because, if properly understood, there is no stigma attached to any of the rungs on the ladder, which should actually be thought of merely as spokes on the great wheel of life. There is a poverty chic among the Santa Cruz food stamp set that gives them as much camaraderie as the Jaycees. Dressing down is the look and being unemployed one of the favored professions.

A Lexicon of Native Usage

EMOTIONS: Good to get in touch with and express. *Percipio ergo sum.* I feel therefore I am.

ENERGY: The cosmic aether through which we travel, thereby making waves or vibrations. Depending on the nature of these waves, we give off *good vibes* or *bad vibes*. Individual bodies also possess *energy centers* that contain these two kinds of energy. Therapeutic schools divide on whether or not it is wise to get in touch with *negative energy*.

CONSCIOUSNESS: What you think is what you are. It is good to have your consciousness *raised*. This results in *higher consciousness*. A raised consciousness can be identified by its use of the suffix *ism*, which is then attached to a long list of nouns that includes race, capital, sex, age, and terror. To be *politically correct*, or *PC*, one opposes all isms, except perhaps the last.

NEW AGE: The one we're waiting for, unless it's already here. The New is distinguished from the old age by its technology, which will be appropriate, convivial, bio-degradable, self-sufficient, and bite-size. The Santa Cruz Mountains are filled with hundreds of New Age practitioners wonderfully preserved in a time warp out of the 1960s. The forty-five health food stores in the county act as their local guild halls.

TRIP: A lifestyle, as in "What's your trip?" Negative energy produces a *bad trip*. Thus the exhortation, "Don't lay your trip on me."

SPACE: The totality of one's feelings at any given time. One can be in a *good space* or a *bad space*. "What kind of space are you in?" might be a question to ask someone on a first date. To be *spaced out* is to have no space at all. The chronic sufferer from spacelessness is called a *space case*.

SELF: Perfectible or transcendable, depending on your preferred technique. Never make any important decisions without consulting it.

BODY: *Body work* is an expression more often applied to humans than cars. Methods include rolfing, acupuncture, acupressure, polarity, shiatsu, reflexology, Alexander, Esalen, Reichian, meditation, structural alignment, biofeedback, and the six yogas. Asceticism is not recommended.

MIND: A good thing to empty. Many techniques for doing so.

Disposable Lifestyles

Down on the Pacific Garden Mall street musicians fiddle while bag ladies pick aluminum out of garbage cans and push their lives in front of them in Safeway shopping carts. The mellow sound of Warmth can be heard live all afternoon in front of the Cooperhouse. Here the Porsche set eats lunch on the patio, while a crowd dances farther out on the sidewalk. Mr. Baseball Cap in white shorts and tennis shoes has been doing Fred Astaire twirls out there for three years.

Other movers to the rhythm include Hari Krishnas, Rastafarians, AFDC mothers, halfway house referrals, dance queens, and plain old drifters on the go—New Age coast-riders with a west in the mind. These are the Problem on the Mall. The retired of all ages. The visible index of structural unemployment. The centrifugal spinoff from centers that are not holding. Mere anarchy loosed upon the world in a blond tide where everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The End of the Rainbow

The largest alternative newspaper in Santa Cruz is called *Good Times*. Its motto is Lighter than Air, and it tries to publish only upbeat articles. Say something nice, or don't say it at all. Here is an excerpt from a piece entitled "Santa Cruz: The End of the Rainbow":

> Situated on the western edge of the continent, perhaps our town actually rests at the end of the rainbow. This is a natural spot for rainbow lovers. A local company called Narwhal manufactures as its sole product a five foot paper rainbow. It sold a quarter million rainbows last year in an expanding market.
>
> Says Don Orosz, co-founder of the company, "People have become psychedelically baptized; they're more than willing to tap into the vital energy reflected in rainbows." Santa Cruz, he says, is "a sheltered cove of high consciousness. It probably, on a per capita basis, has more rainbow symbols than anywhere." Adds Mr. Thomas J. Hughes, the President of Narwhal, "the opposite of the rainbow is the atomic bomb."

The End

There is no last word to be had on chakras and prosperity consciousness. My friend who dyed her clothing orange may tomorrow appear in green. My other friend into massage could turn up with a real estate license. Teri and Nick could reunite over a black eye. Jackie might go to the mountains to take off her clothes. The Indians living across the way could turn into Vietnamese. *I* could get blown away in my yard by a paranoid schizophrenic. *I* could dye my clothing orange, find a guru, get savvy to prosperity consciousness. It's all converging factors. You dream it and it's yours. *–Thomas A. Bass*

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LA NAUSÉE

what is someone
doing in this world
who turns nauseous
at sight of blood

reads a paper
while he eats
diminishing both

dogs and cats
warm to his touch
wives decline
for lack of it

life and death
of the party
his wit turns
and turns again

impassioned
with no politics
moral
with no religion
beset with beliefs
his digestion is good

and therefore, he says,
I've a dreamface
you must be bowel-bound
or boiled in loss
to cut those wrinkles
of reality, that pruning
of the face

Sicilian women
spitting on rocks

I have seen him save
everything for last
including his life

I will awake to it, he says,
when proof comes by
that nothing on earth
need turn my stomach.
That's the kiss
I was put here for

what an extraordinary
prince

–Kenneth Lash

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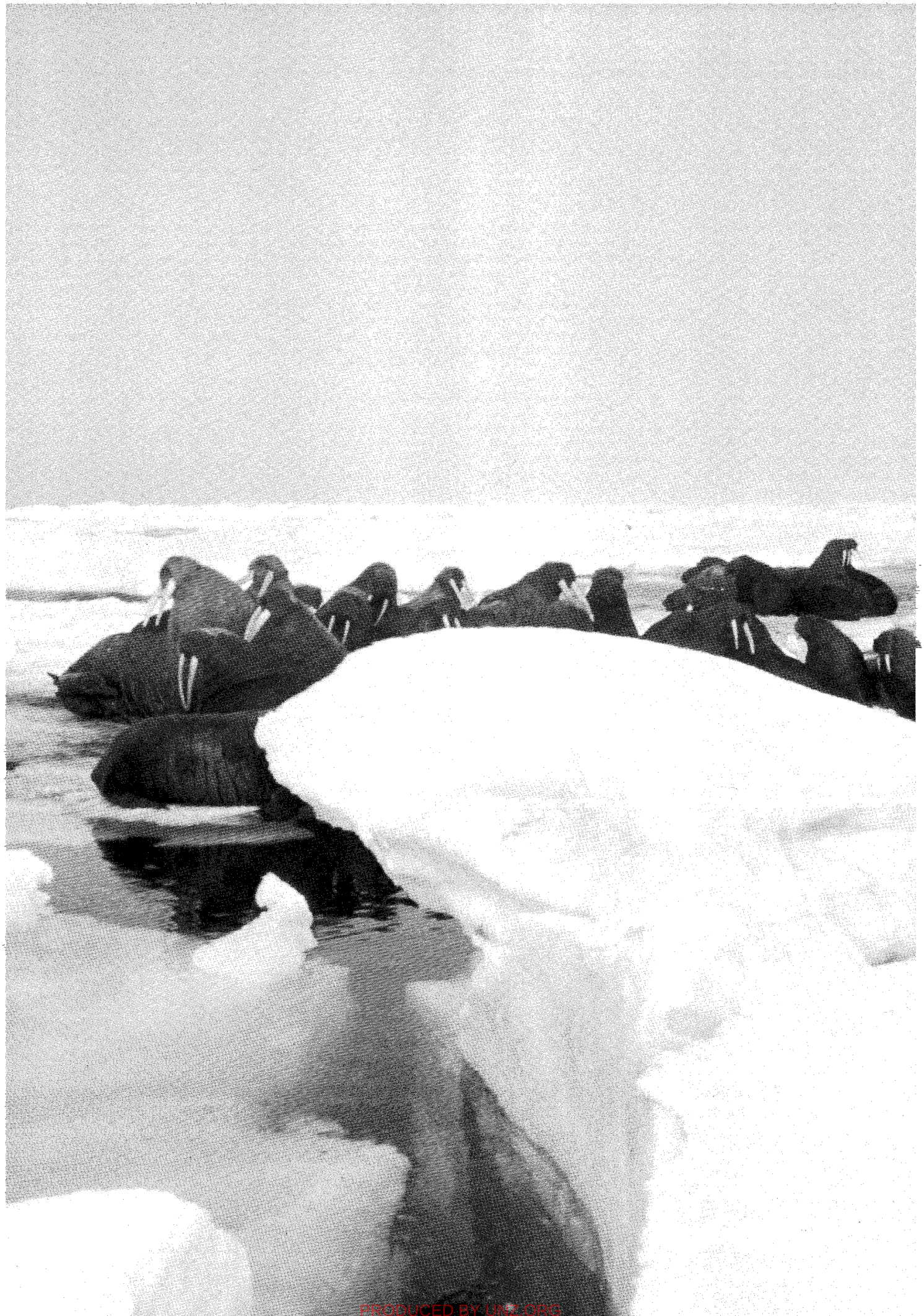

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Barry Lopez

A Faint Light on the Northern Edge

To contemplate change in Alaska is to carry a great bear through the night: the enormous weight is precarious and in the dim light the act itself is transfixing. While the story in other states is now largely a pastoral one of immigrant populations and managed landscapes, here the opinion of a native people is still bright and sharp. And much of the land is unknown, without an inventory of any sort. Issues with a certain political neatness and social history to the south—for example, killing wild animals and otherwise managing their lives—are raw here and far more complicated. In the bear's mind is this thought: suddenly there is a law; there are lives the law wishes to reshape; and there is rural Alaska, as far from the homes of lawmakers in Washington as the streets of Buenos Aires, or the forests of the Mato Grosso. But the bear does not speak. You stumble on in the polar night, listening for the earth to crack beneath your feet.

I.

In October 1972 Congress passed a law called the Marine Mammal Protection Act which took the authority to manage marine mammals and to conduct related research away from the states and gave it to the federal government. The killing of marine mammals (except by Alaskan Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts in a "non-wasteful" manner for purposes of subsistence living or the creation of "authentic articles of handicrafts and clothing") was thereafter forbidden.†

In subsequent years, the administration of the act in Alaska, especially the meaning of its "native exemption clause" and the handling of the mandated process to return marine-mammal management, eventually, to the states, generated acrimony and despair—among wildlife biologists, natives, and environmentalists. The sharpest criticisms were aimed at the undermanned federal bureaucracy that administered the law, and at the biological naïveté and cultural ignorance of those who passed it. The racial discrimination inherent in the law violated Alaska's constitution and set Eskimos and whites, especially white subsistence hunters and those who want Eskimos rapidly assimilated, against each other.

†The MMPA grew out of public concern over three issues: the incidental deaths of porpoise in yellow-fin tuna sets on the high seas; the killing for their fur of baby harp seals in the spring in eastern Canada; and continued international whaling when, it was felt, people no longer required whale products. The act now protects marine mammals in American coastal waters and controls the activities of American fishermen and marine-mammal hunters at sea, in concert with various international treaties and agreements.

John Burns, senior marine mammalogist with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, has said a three-fold tragedy has occurred under the federal plan in Alaska since 1972: federal management has meant, in fact, no management; fully-funded research (needed to properly administer the act) has disappeared; and a latent racial problem has been greatly aggravated.

Administrative law judge Malcolm Littlefield supported Burns' analysis in a 1977 Recommended Decision to the secretaries of commerce and the interior, writing that the federal management program was one "in name only" and that "the record is replete with authoritative and overwhelming evidence" for return of management to the state. A recent Government Accounting Office report chastised the federal government, further, for delay and obfuscation in handling Alaska's appeals.

Why management has not been returned to Alaska has been a question complicated as much by the politics of states' rights and the autocratic paternalism of the federal government as by any genuine concern for the welfare of marine mammals. In September 1981 in amendment hearings before Congress on the MMPA the situation changed dramatically, however. Expected opposition from the federal government and animal protectionists (traditional foes of Alaska's wildlife management programs) was judged to be more perfunctory than substantive. The right to manage marine animals in its waters will likely be returned to Alaska in a process that may be completed as early as September 1, 1982.

In the past few years, I have come and gone in Alaska as a journalist largely concerned with the fate of animals. The greatest threat to animals there, in my view, is neither hunting nor the occasional bungling of any group of humans seeking to manage wildlife populations to accommodate the general public, but habitat destruction; and another kind of destruction equally pernicious, wrought by politics. The federal-state wrangle over who would do the best job of administering the MMPA was a political, not a biological, disagreement; what is to be lamented in its wake is that the state, for all its expertise, may be getting back management of marine mammals in the teeth of a situation it cannot now reverse—an entrenched, growing cynicism toward wildlife law on the part of Eskimos, brought on by federal mismanagement.

Prior to December 21, 1972, the taking in Alaskan coastal waters of marine mammals (sea otters, polar bears, seals, sea lions, walruses, and beluga whales, the larger whales excepted) was legally subject to state-imposed limits. In drawing up the laws, Alaska regarded as basic the need of rural residents, both native and white, to feed

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themselves; violations of the letter of the law were treated accordingly. Effective wildlife management in such vast and remote areas requires such firm but nevertheless accommodating administration if there is to be any respect for the law when state agents are not around—and, as important, if wildlife biologists are to maintain the rapport with natives necessary for the continuation of scientific research in these distant places.

Selective law enforcement like this requires insight, and where Alaska has been sensitive the federal government has been inept. At the village of Barrow the federal government backed down to native opposition in 1961 instead of enforcing (or redrafting) the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since then violations of this act, which prohibits the shooting of waterfowl in the spring, have been systematically ignored by federal agents in Alaska wherever natives are involved.

The difference in general enforcement philosophy—selective vs. none—is familiar to native people from other dealings with the federal government, and it shaped their attitudes toward the MMPA. Under prior state law governing the hunting of marine mammals, most natives felt their special situation as subsistence hunters in distant villages was understood. It was also (courteously) *monitored,* by state fish and game representatives who lived in the villages during hunting seasons. The Eskimos' experience with federal game law was that it was neither enforced nor monitored—and administered by men who sought no intimacy with the circumstances of village life. In the years following the passage of the MMPA a carefully cultivated respect for wildlife law and a genial, cooperative attitude toward wildlife research in native villages began to erode. This cynicism, in my view, can be traced directly to politics—specifically to the federal treatment of native peoples as a minority group that is not to be offended instead of as a contemporary hunting culture, albeit one undergoing rapid change.

The place of hunting in the day-to-day lives of Alaskan coastal residents is poorly understood outside Alaska, and its regulation by the MMPA has been anomalous: the group with the potential for the greatest impact on marine mammal populations—native hunters—has been virtually unregulated. (This is certain to change under state management). A second anomaly, which some see as mute evidence of the law's faulty biology (and good politics) is that the population of one of the animals it sought to protect, the "endangered" Pacific walrus, may have expanded beyond the ability of its food base to sustain it. A third point is the feeling, reiterated among many Alaska marine biologists, that practicable game management took a back seat to a fashionable theory of population dynamics when the law was drafted.

In spite of these (minor) flaws, and inept administration by the federal government, the MMPA is regarded by nearly everyone as pioneering, as essentially a sound and beneficial law. Its real test will come in the months ahead as Alaska attempts to regain management authority. First it must convince the federal government that it has the professional ability to administer the act. Then it must devise management programs for each of the animals involved†, consistent with the goals and policies of the MMPA. These will be based on testimony before the state Board of Game in state-wide hearings and on a public-review process. The Game Board will then issue regulations to control hunting, natural resource exploration, commercial fishing, scientific research and other human activities that bear on the animals' livelihood. It is also likely to designate marine sanctuaries. At this point, anyone who finds fault with the regulations can take the state to court. That someone will seems assured. Many people oppose hunting on ethical grounds; others believe all animals would fare better if they were left unmanaged; still others—some professional guides, for example—would prefer regulations that favored their commercial interests over the dietary needs of people living in coastal villages.

However much this is Alaska's problem, the law itself is a *federal* law; Alaska's management program, tailored to Alaskan needs, will still be commented on by those outside the state, in the same way the disposition of Alaska's lands has been, and the fate of its people and animals at the hands of oil companies. Out of a series of interviews with people directly involved with marine mammals—Eskimo hunters, wildlife biologists, federal administrators, and white subsistence hunters—two thoughts emerge as pertinent to the resolution of this complicated issue.

The first concerns time.

Alaska time is neither Michigan time nor California time, and it is certainly not Washington time. The frustration with the federal law of game managers and native hunters alike derives in large part from the efforts of people outside Alaska to make it the same time here—a moment in history where human values and the cultural ethics of one segment of the population are unknowingly presumed to belong to another segment of the population. They do not, in this case. And although political expediency dictates that everyone adapt under the circumstances, the problem, especially for native people in Alaska, is formidable.

The second issue concerns the place of compassion—the compassion of one culture toward another; compassion toward animals whose fate is so often in human hands; and compassion toward individuals with differing views, who wrestle with exceedingly complex issues and, driven by frustration and a sense of powerlessness, scream in anger at whatever in that moment seems to be the enemy, including the self.

The story that composes the rest of this article is about the passage of different sorts of time; about the need for compassion; and about human confoundment. It pertains to a section of the MMPA that seems widely misunderstood, "the native exemption clause," in a specific context—the hunting and killing of Pacific walrus. It is worth looking at, I believe, because in the bowels of the law is a kind of prejudice.

When the Marine Mammal Protection Act was first taking shape, there was little thought of allowing Eskimos to hunt marine mammals. What these isolated coastal peoples were to eat instead didn't register immediately in the minds of people who lived their lives in the proximity of supermarkets, in an industrialized culture of goods and services. The subsequent provision—that Eskimos could hunt completely without restraint—was liberal thinking as whimsical, an insult to Eskimo people and to their relationships with the animals they hunted because it was a political sop. Eskimos comprise a *culture;* their principal contemporary difficulty is trying to control the direction

†polar bear, walrus, ringed seal, bearded seal, spotted seal, harbor seal, ribbon seal, beluga whale, sea otter, and sea lion

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and timing of changes forced on them. To ignore this in the law is to disparage a relationship—however strangely it may strike the European mind, however crippled it may have become—that was in its original context sacred: that of a hunting people to the animals they hunted. And the irony, and I think the danger, is that to show no compassion for the beleaguered Eskimo is to reveal a contrived compassion for animals.

In the spring of 1981, in an attempt to elucidate this problem, I went to St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, during walrus-hunting time.

II.

"You have garden. Our garden is the water. I think about that one."

Alex Akeya, 52, hunter, Savoonga, Alaska

The mountain is called Sevuokuk. It stands at the northwest tip of St. Lawrence Island in the northern Bering Sea and from its ridgetop the Russian coast is visible, the sea cliffs and deep fiords of the Chukotsk Peninsula, forty miles away across the broken sea ice.

Some 600 feet below, where the dark western face of the mountain meets the cobble beach, is a village. It, too, used to be called Sevuokuk. Now it is called Gambell, after the village's first school teacher, who drowned nearby in 1898. About 450 people live in modern homes here now; from this height, in this subarctic setting, the snow-bound houses and the figures of people moving over the land evince a predictable Siberian stoicism, even in the bright sunlight of this May afternoon.

The village is built on a spit of black basaltic stones, ice-polished, ocean-rolled chips of Sevuokuk itself. Vaguely discernible where the wind has blown the tundra and beach stones clear of snow are the outlines of other villages abandoned over the centuries. An "old village" of Cape Cod-like houses stands near the ocean now, but most residents live in the "new village" of better-insulated houses with suburban lines and smaller windows, built farther back from the water. Long pieces of black baleen lie on some of these modern aluminum roofs. They lift occasionally in the ceaseless wind, sleek, ten-foot slats of plankton-straining keratin that until a few weeks ago hung from the upper jaw of a bowhead whale.

The conventional evidence of a harsh life is everywhere insistent on a Western eye. Pack ice floating in 31° water; a bleak coast stretching off south to lowering gray skies; the wind-ravaged tundra sloping eastward toward the Alaska mainland. Weather records for Gambell are to the point: rarely colder than −10°F or warmer than 55°. An arctic marine climate; ice-bound and with gale-force winds in the winter; cool, foggy, rainy summers; frequently stormy seas.

That there is food here, however, and in some years in abundance, is evident from the bone midden slowly crumbling on the phosphate-enriched tundra southwest of the village. The bones of walrus, of bearded seal, ringed seal, and ribbon seal, of bowhead and minke and gray whales. The bones of fish, the bones of birds, the shells of mollusks. Food arduous and sometimes dangerous to retrieve, requiring patience and great stamina.

From high on Sevuokuk, the village seems fierce, the ocean immense, the May wind unremitting, damp and cold. Aluminum boats pulled up on the stony beaches (the

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water is too rough to hunt walrus today), skin boats inverted on wood racks where dogs can't reach them, and one dark figure handing strips of blubber up to another on a meat-drying lattice—all this contributes to the village's air of natural rectitude, its aura of survival, one that stretches back to the time when this island was the last remnant of the Bering Land Bridge to the New World.

From the mountain I watch the northeastern sky over the Seward Peninsula, to guess what weather is coming. And the birds. At some moments toward morning and evening there is such a wild profusion of birds you wonder for a moment if you are not in another century. Flights of common eider and migrating oldsquaw sail low and fast over open water, through flocks of cormorants and thick-billed murres, beneath wheeling glaucous gulls with their four-foot wing spans of white, and past skittery phalaropes, their legs as delicate as a storm petrel's. The passage of thousands, then tens of thousands of crested and least auklets suddenly explodes against the sea ice—and then disappears against a stretch of dark water again.

In less than a month ardent birdwatchers, come many thousands of miles, will arrive here, hopeful of a rare sight—a Baikal teal, the delicately pink Ross's gull, or a European ruff. Eskimos have trouble grasping the phenomenon—hundreds of well-to-do foreigners wandering the rocky beaches and climbing the sea cliffs with field glasses and life lists. The ethologist Niko Tinbergen wrote in *The World of the Herring Gull* that birders have a deep hunger for ancestral landscapes.

This land below Sevuokuk, despite the high, faint whine of a snowmachine from the village, is an ancestral landscape.

The distance that separates St. Lawrence from, say, Denver, is difficult to overstate—politically, geographically, or culturally. It is at the farthest reaches of the country, hard by Russia and the international dateline. Nine hundred Eskimos, living in roughly equal numbers in two villages, Gambell and Savoonga, speak a foreign language. Their ancestral ties are to Siberia—for some only a generation or two removed. The older people speak wistfully of their last visits there in the 'forties.

Alongside modern tools such as lightweight chainsaws (to cut driftwood for new, air-tight stoves), many elements of Yupik, or Siberian Eskimo, culture remain intact and in daily use—tools like the ice-chisel; clothing—a new pair of ringed-seal hide pants hanging on a hook; and habits like sitting on the floor for meals, sharing raw meat, thinly sliced, from a common tray, though the floor is now linoleum, not wood or hide, and the service a plastic TV-dinner tray, not a driftwood platter.

The visitor to either village sees walrus and bearded seal meat hanging to dry outside nearly every house, along with tom cod and sculpins. In entryways cached seal blubber self-renders its oil and meat cools in aluminum bowls. In each living room stand well-used guns. Outdoors, at nearly any hour, young boys are hunting birds—the ubiquitous snow bunting—with slingshots; or stalking imaginary polar bear with their pellet guns in the pressure ridges of the shore-fast ice. In May, the close of the whaling season and the beginning of walrus hunting, with only a few hours of deep, dusky light either side of one a.m. to sharpen a feeling of otherworldliness, the sense of distance from the towns of the Mississippi Valley and the Piedmont Plateau is acute.

May is a time of strong political and racial tension in both villages. Residents are hunting walrus and they know that some people are strongly opposed to their doing so. (The hunting of bowhead whales is more strictly monitored by both the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and federal representatives in accord with the provisions of an agreement between the United States and the International Whaling Commission). The tension is political in the sense that laws governing hunting affect diet and, anthropologists have stressed, maintaining a traditional diet reënforces a culture's sense of well being. A threat to diet bears on a threat to sovereignty, in the Yupik view.

The tension is racial because it is white people who come to St. Lawrence and tell the Yupik their hunting life is no longer relevant, their politics myopic or naïve, their cultural views increasingly hard to accommodate. Or, rather, do *not* come to St. Lawrence, but write such things down in distant cities. And it is white people who make the laws.†

On a Friday afternoon I sat down with George Noongwook in his home in Savoonga and asked him about criticisms of the subsistence life here.

Mr. Noongwook is a young man, a hunter with a family. He is also president of the village corporation. After thinking for a few moments he said, in a softly-modulated voice, that any regulations imposed by an outside authority normally create a general hostility, in this instance an Eskimo hostility toward white people in general, but also toward other Eskimos and even walrus. At one point he shook his head and said "[The public debate over] these regulations [has] affected the minds of our hunters." When hunters take their anxieties with them out onto the ice they hunt poorly, he explained, with a psychological encumbrance.

Mr. Noongwook then asked if I was familiar with Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization. When I said no, he explained as follows: The first needs of a person are for food, shelter, and clothing. Their realization forms a basis for self-esteem. If Eskimos' very hunting and gathering habits (as distinct from agricultural or pastoral practices) are being debased, then their chances of achieving the sort of self-esteem that diffuses racial animosity and encourages a good sense of self-direction are that much less.

He added, "When you arrive at a policy without the agreement of all the people involved, the policy is unrealistic and unenforceable. It will never be lived up to."

Toward the end of our conversation, Mr. Noongwook spoke about culture. He felt the basic notion of a culture, in which a man provides for a family and a community provides for itself, was one white people did not clearly

†There is a paradox here, which unfolds more fully below. First, although the framers of the MMPA utilized Eskimo testimony, the law nevertheless reflects only a white rationale about human-animal relationships. Second, precisely because it puts no limits at all on Eskimo hunting, the MMPA has generated strident (white) criticism of Eskimo hunting as "inauthentic," "excessive," and "wasteful." It is this criticism, a debate over their "authenticity" as a people, that angers Eskimos, not the MMPA. The more insightful hunters, however, see that the act has created this trouble. It is a law which gives them no help, no guidelines in their changing relationships with marine mammals, as the state laws once did. And not a few hunters wonder how much the federal government really cares about the welfare of the animals if, all of a sudden in 1972, it is no longer necessary to have any game laws.

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grasp. I asked if he thought there was a crucial part of white culture that Eskimos could not grasp. He thought for a moment and then said it was the disinterested concern of white people for the welfare of animals like the walrus. For the Eskimo, community is a *local* phenomenon, self-regulating, self-providing, and self-critical. A community that stretches from Miami Beach to the Bering Sea is difficult to fathom.

Outside attention is focused on walrus hunting primarily because of the practice of killing a walrus only for its ivory tusks, cutting its head off and abandoning the carcass. The evidence that some Eskimos do kill walrus only for their ivory is indisputable; *why* they do is something Eskimos can explain coherently.

First, from a strictly ecological perspective, killing an excessive number of walrus—more than can be stored and eaten—is not now affecting the overall size of the walrus population, which is approaching 275,000 animals, probably an all-time high. (This, and the fact that the Pacific walrus may be outstripping its food base, is confirmed by marine biologists). The meat, moreover, is not, again in the ecological view, "wasted." It feeds amphipods, shrimp, crabs, and other crustaceans.

Secondly, the ethical issue of "headhunting," as it is called, and its social ramifications are not, say Eskimos, issues to be addressed by outsiders but within the Eskimo community. (Written and oral records do testify to self-imposed quotas and other self-initiated hunting regulations on St. Lawrence, such as a prohibition in the 'fifties against taking cranes and swans.)

The essence of their relationship with the walrus, say Eskimos, is that the walrus provides. In their view, in which "provision" is broadly understood, the walrus still provides for them. Its ivory tusks are a commodity that can be turned into cash; its blubber and meat, which no longer feed dogs they no longer have, is left out where the walrus live, to feed other animals. In the words of one man, "The answer to those who object to leaving the meat behind is *survival*. We are in an age of adjustment to a cash economy, and we are using the walrus to survive."

If one were to judge such thoughts it would have to be against a background of other factors. The MMPA prohibits the commercial utilization of marine mammal parts by anyone; the suggestion that the meat and hides of headhunted walrus be processed and sold are presently untenable. Secondly, in spite of headhunting, the average number of walrus killed in the Bering Strait area has risen only very slightly since 1972 and remains constant at about 5500 animals killed and roughly 3500 animals retrieved in the American and Soviet harvests.

The vision of blood and gore associated with hunting large animals, let alone headhunting, obscures several other points. The practice of taking one "product" from an animal and throwing the rest out is the Western custom in both fur trapping and trophy hunting. (In the world of the Yupik it is the killer whale that lacerates and pummels a gray whale to death and takes only the tongue, "abandoning" the rest.) Second, headhunting is in some respects a political act, rooted in the hostility Mr. Noongwook alluded to, and in other cultural frustrations—a sense of abandonment and alienation in the modern world, of which the walrus is also a part. (An enlightening analog concerning historical conflict between Algonquin Indians and beaver was described in a recent book, *The Keepers of the Game,* by Calvin Martin.)

Lastly, though Eskimos still think it exceedingly rude to openly criticize anyone, more than one of the people I spoke with, especially the older men, did say they were disturbed about the meat being left behind on the ice. One man offered this: "When I was a little boy [in the 1930s] we set our own limits." And not wishing to indict anyone in particular, he added, "Some of us still hunt this way." And another told me, "I always take a piece of meat—even if it is only a small piece—from each one [I kill]."

All St. Lawrence Eskimos do not think alike, or address their common problems with the same intensity. Some of the younger people don't know the difference between a ringed seal and a spotted seal; some of the older people believe the younger people eat too much sugar and are "too strong in the mouth." Typically, the older men are more ingenuous with whites than the younger men, and more knowledgeable about the physical environment. Young men, not as alert to change in the weather or as keen about the significance of natural events, are sometimes pugnacious about their hunting heritage. (This attitude irritates many white Alaskans, and precipitates absolute judgments about the imminent collapse of the Eskimo hunting culture. When a squad of five-year-olds follows you through the village store chanting "honk, honk, honk, honky," like ducks; when racial slurs are called out in English and Yupik at you across the snow from the night shadows around houses, it is easy to see how, under a constant barrage of this, one could lose patience. On the other hand, I recall a man whose pile of fresh meat and ivory I was looking at who snapped, "Who are you? What do you want?" When I said, "Just to look," and that I'd stand back up on the beach if it bothered him, he smiled and shook his head and indicated with his free hand to go ahead and look. In my experience, most such encounters end as amicably.)

There are good reasons why some of the younger men are not as familiar with the land. The consolidation of people in the two villages on St. Lawrence, partly for reasons of trade with the outside world, curtailed months of living in and traveling to and from temporary hunting and fishing camps. Many young people no longer see parts of the country, or the variety of animals and natural phenomena, their fathers saw. They also left the island to attend Bureau of Indian Affairs schools at a time in their lives when, traditionally, they would have been out hunting with their fathers and relatives.

One of the most complex dilemmas for the St. Lawrence people derives both from this latter situation and from the havoc wreaked on a traditional family culture by the accelerated change to a cash economy. One can watch it unfold in microcosm, in a way so painful no one escapes. Young men, eager to prove themselves, make mistakes when they hunt—use a rifle of too light a caliber, or shoot too quickly, without deliberation, and so leave a wounded walrus to die. The older men, with no tradition of severe reprimand, are not harsh in their criticism of their sons and nephews. The result: bullet-scarred walrus wash up dead on American shores, outraging people; and wash up on Russian shores, triggering criticism of American wildlife management and politics. These high losses are denounced by everyone—but to see the wedge driven between Eskimo father and son over it is as wrenching as the sight of a dead walrus lying on the beach. Everyone is cut by the shame and anger.

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While the Yupik culture is changing daily in such ways, a law such as the MMPA tends to isolate them in a bygone era. While somehow acceptable risking his life with primitive tools in brutal weather to feed his family, an Eskimo is unacceptable as someone who wants an outboard for his boat or to eat in a restaurant in Anchorage. "There is no native insistence," John Burns observes, "on living as hard a life as possible." On St. Lawrence it is indicative and succinct to see a 54-year old man reading *Future Shock* while his reticent and smiling wife prepares walrus liver with onions for dinner in an electric fry pan.

The Latin generic for the walrus is *Odobenus*, literally "the tooth walker," after the animal's habit of pulling itself out on ice floes with its tusks. The tusks of a large male may exceed 35″ and weigh four to six pounds each. Their primary function is social, for display and fighting, not for grubbing on the ocean bottom. According to the MMPA, ivory from a walrus shot by a native can be sold in its raw state only to another Alaskan native (at $18-25/lb. currently in the coastal villages). Once carved it is worth much more and may be sold to anyone. These restrictions have probably depressed the walrus harvest to some extent but they have also created a black market for ivory. On February 4, 1981, eighty U.S. Fish & Wildlife agents in simultaneous raids in Massachusetts, New Jersey, California, and Washington seized 10,000 pounds of fresh, raw ivory, worth an estimated $450,000 wholesale. Much of the ivory came from St. Lawrence, but the initial transactions were apparently legitimate, with visiting natives who did not announce their role as middlemen for several white buyers.†

The carving and selling of ivory is one of the very few ways St. Lawrence Eskimos can create cash. Beyond this there is only trapping for Arctic fox, some local construction, working for government agencies, and digging up fossil ivory and other artifacts in the old villages. (Thus the spuriousness of a popular criticism: "Eskimos are buying televisions with walrus ivory!")

Some of the government work Eskimos have done over the years has been with field biologists. Though not financially remunerative, it is thought rewarding to work with Western men who share a keen interest in the natural world. These Eskimos enjoy a camaraderie and rapport with white men that other Eskimos respect, and they are sometimes called upon to "translate" the enigmas of the outer world.

One Saturday morning in Savoonga I sat with such a man, called Alex Akeya. He is 52, a former mayor of the village, a highly-regarded hunter. Over a meal of raw bearded seal, whale blubber, walrus stew, and pilot bread, he spoke with an infectious delight, always finding something hopeful in difficult situations. I asked him about a very touchy issue—establishing a walrus quota for each village. There is no biological need for such a limit and the very suggestion is regarded as a cultural insult; but some people, even some Yupik, have suggested this might curtail the "waste" of walrus meat.

Recalling a period of walrus quotas (imposed surreptitiously by the federal government under state law in 1976), Mr. Akeya said, "We try to follow the rules, even when we hurt real bad. Three walrus [was] not enough for my family. I talk[ed] to my people [urging them not to exceed the quota]. No friend then. I got real tough time, but I keep talking with them, and they understand."

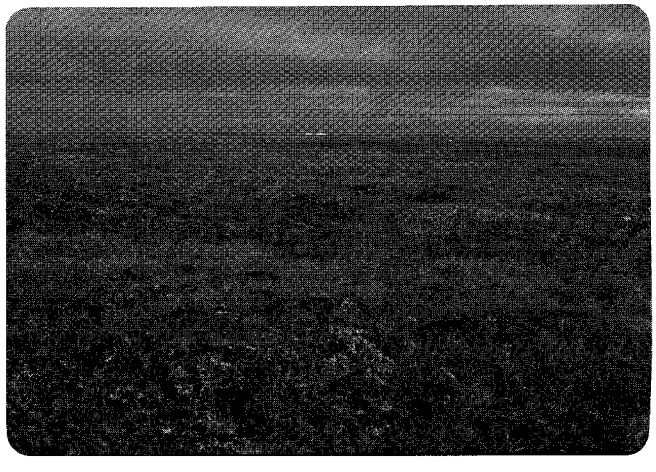
Mr. Akeya remembers the Japanese invasion of the nearby Aleutians; he has walked the beaches of St. Lawrence looking for flotsam and jetsam from Russian ships, honoring a request of the American military. Like many Eskimo men his age, he is patriotic, without guile, and trusting, which sometimes puts him at odds with younger, more cynical men in the village. He said to me, "We are U.S. citizens, no matter how they hurt us. Someday later on they understand, and know this animal [the walrus]. This is my food."

Mr. Akeya himself is concerned about the erection of oil rigs in Bristol and Kuskokwim Bays, where walrus feed heavily on clams in the winter. And about the effect of oil spills on those clams, or of blowouts caused by the treacherous movement of Bering Sea pack ice.

"I should fight that one really hard, you know." he said with half a wistful smile. "But they got lots of money. Lots of money."

Most of the time I was in Savoonga a north wind kept the pack ice tight against the shore-fast ice. With no leads, there was no walrus hunting. Gambell, 45 miles to the west, has access to both northward-facing and westward-facing shores. Because there is usually a lead open off one or the other, hunting is generally better there. The experience in Savoonga, however, was a reminder—you can't hunt whenever you wish, or even when you must. And if the walrus are too far away, you can go out for days on end and come back with nothing.

Dennis Akeya, a young hunter, told me about getting caught once in a storm. He and his companions had taken swift advantage of the first open water in more than a week to run out far to the east of the island. A storm came up and the shifting ice finally crushed their boat, although they were able to leap clear. They walked all the way back to Savoonga, jumping from ice floe to ice floe, to arrive in the dark, soaked and freezing, in hypothermic shock. The next year, while whaling on the far side of the island, Dennis Akeya saw a rope swing into a motor prop where it caught and flipped the boat. When he saw the men go into the icy water, he said he felt the muscles in his chest constrict so he could hardly breathe.



†Under the newly-amended MMPA, Eskimos themselves will likely determine the market structure for walrus ivory.

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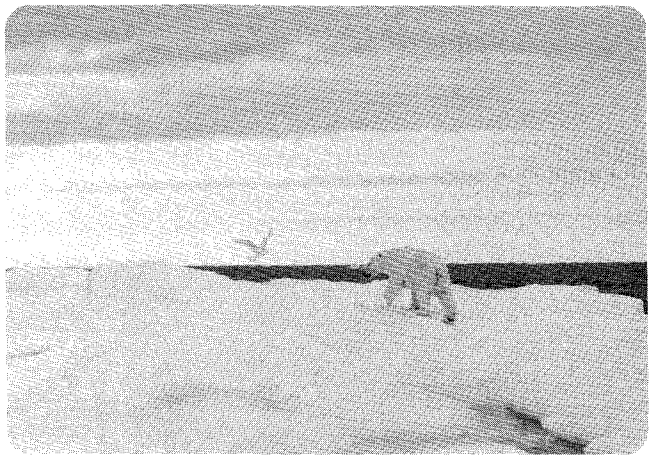
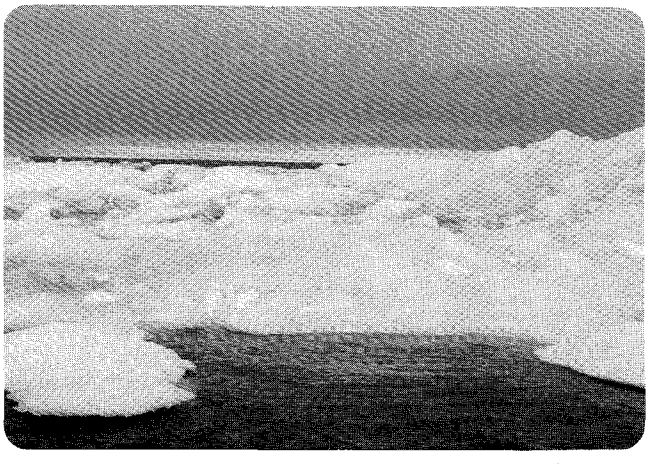


Until you ask, you don't guess how many men have been close to death here.

St. Lawrence Island was named by Vitus Bering on St. Lawrence's Day, August 10, 1728. Otto von Kotzebue of the Russian navy may have been the first white to visit the island, in 1816. By the 1840s whaling boats were calling. (They would deplete the population of bowhead whales, then decimate the walrus population for oil, killing at the rate of nearly 10,000 walrus a year at one point. There are those who say the MMPA now seeks to right these wrongs by suppressing a culture that was not responsible for these excesses.) The whalers were followed by whiskey traders and government revenue cutters. In 1900, Sheldon Jackson, General Agent of Education in Alaska for the Department of the Interior, brought a reindeer herd to the island to provide Eskimos with an income, a project that saw the island's tundra vegetation ravaged by the animals, whose burgeoning numbers ultimately crashed, along with the project.

In the 1920s the island's first archaeologist, Otto W. Geist, began his work. He was followed by such people as the naturalist Adolph Murie, and in the 'fifties by a small group of ornithologists, botanists, and marine mammalogists, among them John Burns and Francis Fay. (Fay's monograph on the Pacific walrus, dedicated to the hunters of St. Lawrence Island, is about to be published in the distinguished North American Faunal Series.)



To read these men now is to be aware of a time that has nearly passed. There are few men like them coming up in the ranks of wildlife management—indefatigable, willing to live for weeks on end in marginal comfort, with scant funds. Passing with them are their Eskimo companions, men like Alex Akeya, now in their fifties and sixties. Murie spoke for all these men when he wrote in 1936, ". . . the animate life occupying the same territory with the Eskimo becomes closely associated with their lives and not only colors their traditions and mode of thought, but often is the very substance of it."

It is these men, whose optimism in adverse circumstances, whose overwhelming knowledge of the local landscape, and whose technical and spiritual confidence are so evident, that Constantine Kavafy had in mind when he wrote:

> *And now what will become of us without barbarians?*
> *These people were some sort of solution.*

Sitting now on top of Sevuokuk Mountain, watching the birds hauling before the wind, the memory of these lines turns poignant and personal. I have for the past few days been the guest of Vernon Slwooko. I have found his name in the acknowledgements of various scientific papers, dating back thirty years. His son, Vernon Slwooko, Jr., is one of the best young hunters in the village and is nearly as knowledgeable. But the son has grown up in another time, is more anxious than his father about new hunting regulations.

This link, father to son, uncle to nephew, is nearly everything in learning how to hunt, which is different from learning how to shoot. As the older men grow yet older and their grandsons are drawn to other interests, cultural intimacy with the landscape passes away. Without that knowledge, the land becomes harder to know, and unknown it is not as fiercely protected against arbitrary and exploitative change. (A growing fear among Eskimos awarded lands under the Native Claims Settlement Act, passed in 1971 to protect their aboriginal inheritance, is that the Act has a provision that will one day betray them. The Act stipulates that after 1991 Eskimos can sell their lands to anyone. With the demands of a cash economy upon them, some Eskimos, it is feared, will want to sell out to energy and real estate speculators.)

On Sevuokuk's ridge, I am drawn up again into the lives of the birds. High up on a mountain, with your head in the wind like this and at a distance from the shore of the continent, you rub against their space. One hundred and forty-one species of birds have been seen here. Sandpipers and gulls, plovers, eiders, auklets, jaegers, murrelets and geese; the snowy owl, the slender-billed shearwater; and those with haunting names—whimbrel and godwit. Snow goose. Wandering tattler. In the tundra muck of his excavations at Kukulik, Otto W. Geist made a list almost as extensive of objects of daily use made from the ivory and bones of the walrus.

The first morning we are able to hunt, the seas having subsided, is bright but cold. I join three other men in a 16-foot aluminum Starcraft skiff with a 55-horsepower outboard. It will transport only 900 pounds, and with its

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low freeboard is not particularly seaworthy. In recent years Eskimos have come to prefer it over their larger umiaks, which are slower and heavier. You can cover more square miles of pack ice in the aluminum boat, and get home quicker if a storm comes up.

The boats, about 15 of them, fan out in the loose ice north of the village. Everyone stays in touch by radio but for most of the day we are out of sight of one another. And there is something else new in the past few years, along with the smaller, faster boats—an edge of competition.

Anthropologists living with hunting peoples as diverse as Wainwright Eskimos in Northern Alaska (Richard Nelson in *Hunters of the Northern Ice*) and Valley Bisa in Zambia (Stuart Marks in *Large Mammals and a Brave People*) have written of the place of hunting in aboriginal culture. Their thoughts are worth noting, as they still pertain to the hunting of walrus on St. Lawrence. In hunting for an animal, they have written, you do not so much think about the situation as participate in it. You are immersed in the world of natural elements, and sustain a heightened sensitivity to them. In entering, as it were, the world in which the other animals live, you make contact with a life that lies outside your own personal life. This is one source of exhilaration in the hunt—to escape the anxieties the self-conscious mind maintains. A feeling of community—with animals, with other hunters, with those in the village who will eat the food—is pervasive.

As we speed north and west, I recall many of Nelson's thoughts about hunting walrus. Walrus hunting is nearly as dangerous as whaling, he says. Male walrus are the size of small cars and can weigh almost two tons. They can and have torn open, swamped and flipped boats, and pursued and killed Eskimos in the water. Writes Nelson: "The walrus is regarded [by Wainwright Eskimos] as being mysteriously intelligent and malevolent toward man." Hunting them is not thought to be "fun" in the way Western people sometimes view adventure.

We scan the ice floes as we travel, studying the bright light for a dark pattern, stopping occasionally to climb a pressure ridge and use field glasses. Late in the afternoon we find walrus, near the Russian coast. It is nearly seven o'clock but the sun is still high, the wind calm. Three males are hauled out on the ice, unaware of our quiet approach through the floes. Walrus are slow to react to the presence of humans. They are also hard to kill with one shot unless the bullet is carefully placed. The walrus are alert to us now, but we have no clear shot. In heavy ice one of the hunters steps out onto the floe. Small dark eyes above the huge tusks, above translucent moustaches, flash suddenly white in dark foreheads. The massive brown heads roll against a blue sky, heaving for the water. The shots come quickly and are well placed but the walrus in the same moment are off the ice. One sinks instantly. The hunters concentrate on the other two, killing both quickly, but in such tight, dangerous quarters it is hard to maneuver the boat, and only one animal is secured.

The trip home is very long. I try to recall each detail, each sound, each shot; how huge the animals were; how quiet it was afterward. The quick, efficient work that was made of the carcass, the consignment of what was left to the Bering Sea, the gestures of a man's hands over the waters.

Most of the others are back before us. On the beach are female walrus hides (for a new umiak hull); yearling walrus hides (harpoon ropes); a bearded-seal hide (lashings for the umiak hull); and walrus liver, seal blubber, murres and crested auklets (dinners).

By the time everyone is home, the meat and ivory and hides loaded onto sleds behind Honda three-wheelers, it is nearly eleven. The sun has set; just a faint light glows on the snow as I walk back to the home where I am staying. Walking alone, slowly, pulled back in my parka against a fresh wind, I see in the snow one of the oldest signs of human life: between the tracks of a sled's runners, a trail of blood. The trail ends at a meat cache. I think how often the presence of blood is confused with cruelty. And this endless reconciliation of Jacob with his brother Esau.

The following morning I fly out of Gambell. On the walk to the airstrip I see a lapland longspur building a nest in the cranium of a walrus skull. A favorite spot. It is windy and rainy, and clouds hug the ridge of Sevuokuk Mountain. As the twin-engine AeroCommander taxis to the end of the runway, the co-pilot, noting the detritus of some military project, says, "Boy, isn't it just like the military to build in the most miserable places on earth." I imagine what it will be like here when the snow is gone, and the people go inland after bearberries and rose hips, to collect eggs, and fish for chinook salmon.

III.

The flight terminates in the small coastal village of Nome. The ravages of alcohol on a native population are clearly evident along Front Street, as much as they are not in Gambell and Savoonga. I think as I walk along, as I have often in native villages in Alaska, of Hiroshima—that the bomb is just taking fifty years here in its detonation instead of five seconds.

I do not as a journalist know any confusion more profound than where allegiance or even sympathy is to lie when aboriginal and industrial cultures collide. For it is not, in this instance, simply a matter of a hunting culture fragmenting at breakneck speed; of the language and diet, mythos, sense of origin and place, clothing, social gestures, politics, and economy of one culture collapsing beneath those of another; of a basic practice, the procurement of one's food, being subjected to a legal accounting, however wise, generous and well-intentioned the law might be. It is the potential for total and utter loss—in an atmosphere of subtle intimidation, righteous ultimatum, and too little charity. The potential loss to our understanding of the paradoxes of life, and the range of human response to them, is as great as if we were to passively witness the forcible alteration of any other ecosystem—the hardwood forests of New England or the Sargasso Sea.

Whatever hope the Eskimo of St. Lawrence Island, or the Kreen-Akrore of the Amazon Basin or the Tasaday of the Philippines, have, however the advantages of their particular insights are to accrue to all people, lies with their being allowed to change in and according to their own time. What is required of us is a most unfamiliar patience.

This story, then, has two endings. The first bears on the fate of a law that seeks to protect animals but which was drafted with too little respect for, and too little insight into, the people who had the oldest and closest relation-

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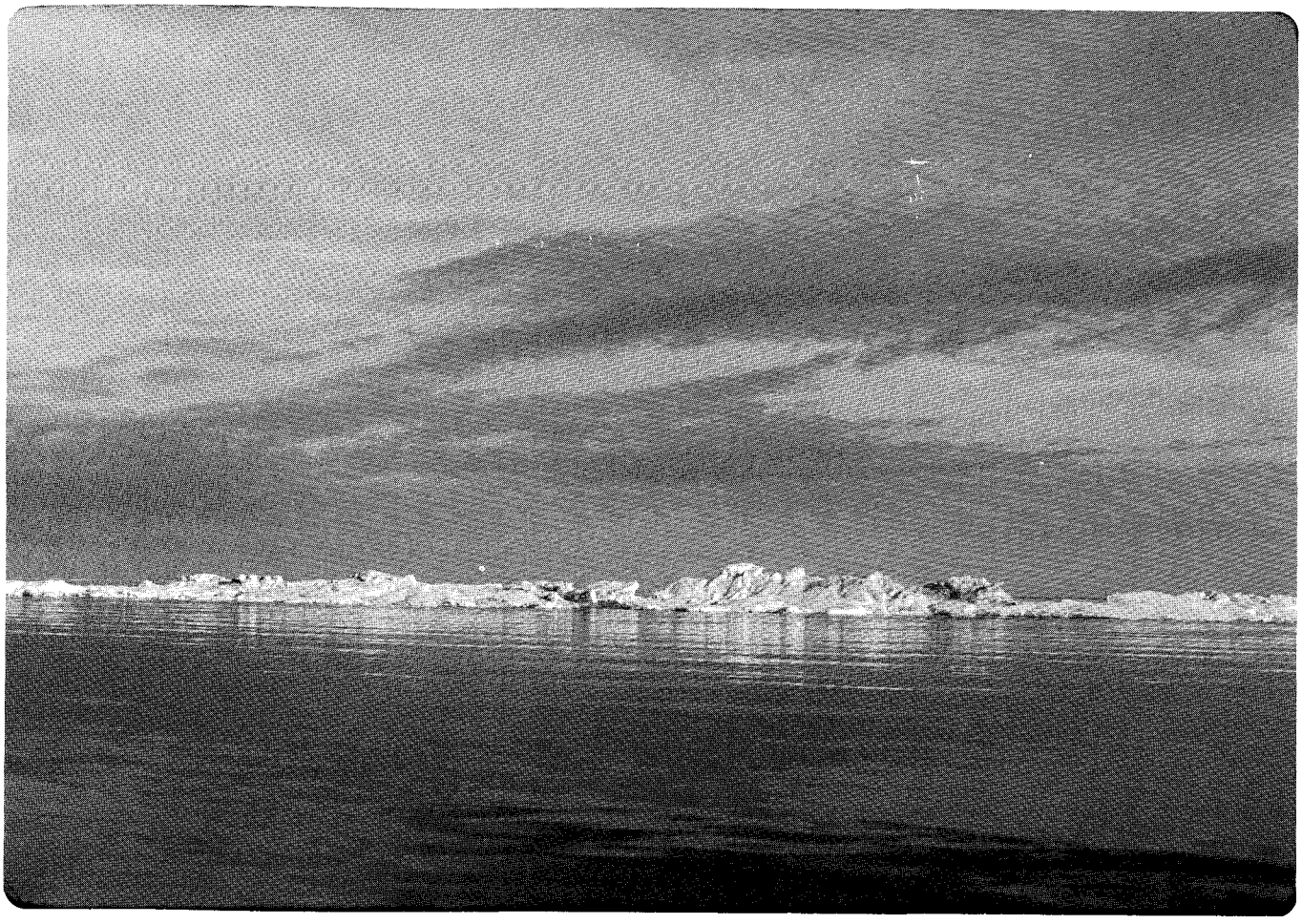

ships with those animals. The drafting of Alaska's management plan will bring up issues that outrage people: an open market for walrus ivory; preferential treatment for subsistence hunters; the possibility of a commercial walrus harvest; the introduction of sport hunting. Their (fallible) resolution will be based on the (fallible) testimony of biologists, Eskimo hunters, environmentalists, petroleum geologists, and other interested people before the Board of Game, a group of seven (fallible) men appointed by the governor.

The second ending is not an ending at all but an unanswerable question that has been earnestly framed in nearly every age: what are our obligations in this thicket of prejudice, in which people motivated to seek a common good always find it necessary to alter the lives of other people, let alone those of animals, or the land itself?

I am not a hunter. The perspective one appreciates in Gambell is not the one that predominates in Nome, where there is much cynicism about the day-to-day life of Eskimos. Nor is it a view readily supported in Anchorage, where newspapers run pictures of dead walrus over simplistic and mawkish captions. Nor is it the prevailing view, say, in Des Moines, where residents know little of the walrus, because it is not part of their culture. It is the view of a people whose *coherence* is threatened by sudden, radical changes which they feel all but helpless to control. There is a Japanese word for them: *hibakusha*, "explosion-affected people," those still suffering the effects of the blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The last day I was in Nome I read the original record of testimony before Congress on the MMPA in the library. Some of it seemed woefully naïve, but I was nearly always moved by the evidence of sincerity and selflessness in the voices. I walked along the desolate beach pondering a conundrum: that justice and compassion rival each other, and laws are incomplete resolutions of these two impulses.

I went to dinner with two biologists. We talked about migrating gray whales, and the behavior of pelagic birds I was not familiar with. On the way back from the restaurant we passed a group of elderly tourists walking slowly down Front Street, peering vacantly into closed gift shops. They had arrived on a small jet that morning from somewhere to the south. I had seen them going through the town earlier in a blue and white van marked ARCTIC TOURS. East of town they had examined mining dredges from Nome's gold rush years and ridden in a wheeled sled behind sled dogs. They were mostly older women, walking arm-in-arm in translucent raincoats and bright pastel clothes. One of them had a dog in her arms. They paused on the sidewalks, hesitant and alert, looking up and down the street as though they expected something exotic to appear, or to happen. At that moment one of the biologists said, "The thing Eskimos cannot seem to comprehend is that other people are actually going to interfere in their lives."

In the rearview mirror I watched the tour group disappear into the doorway of the Gold Nugget Inn. □

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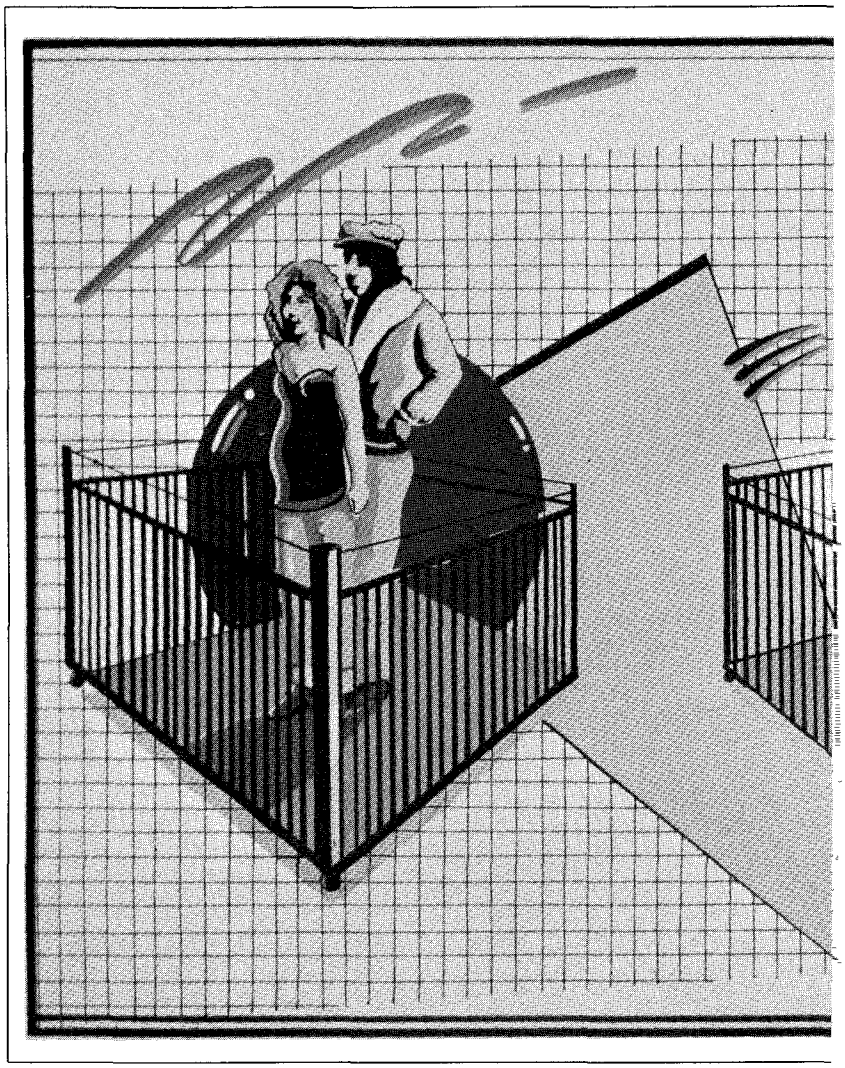

LOUISE ERDRICH

SCALES

for I.G. & B.P.

I was sitting before my third or fourth Jellybean—which is anisette, grain alcohol, a lit match, and a small, wet explosion in the brain. On my left sat Gerry Nanapush of the Chippewa Tribe. On my right sat Dot Adare of the has-been, of the never-was, of the what's-in-front-of-me people. Still in her belly and tensed in its fluids, coiled the child of their union, the child we were waiting for, the child whose name we were making a strenuous and lengthy search for in a cramped and littered bar at the very edge of that Dakota town.

Gerry had been on the wagon for thirteen years. He was drinking a tall glass of tonic water in which a crescent of soiled lemon bobbed, along with a maraschino cherry or two. He was 36 years old and had been in prison, or out of prison and on the run, for exactly half of those years. He was not in the clear yet nor would he ever be, that is why the yellow tennis player's visor was pulled down to the rim of his eyeglass frames. The bar was dimly lit and smoky; his glasses were very dark. Poor visibility must have been the reason Officer Lovchik saw him first.

Lovchik started toward us with his hand on his hip, but Gerry was over the backside of the booth and out the door before Lovchik got close enough to make a positive identification.

"Siddown with us," said Dot to Lovchik when he neared our booth. "I'll buy you a drink. It's so dead here. No one's been through all night."

Lovchik sighed, sat, and ordered a blackberry brandy.

"Now tell me," she said, staring at him, "honestly. What do you think of the name Ketchup Face?"

It was through Gerry that I first met Dot, and in a bar like that one, only denser with striving drinkers, construction crews in town because of the highway. I sat down by Gerry early in the evening and we struck up a conversation, during the long course of which we became friendly enough for Gerry to put his arm around me. Dot entered at exactly the wrong moment. She was quick-tempered anyway and being pregnant (Gerry had gotten her that way on a prison visit five months previous) increased her irritability. It was only natural then, I guess, that she would pull the barstool out from under me and threaten my life. Only I didn't know she was threatening my life at

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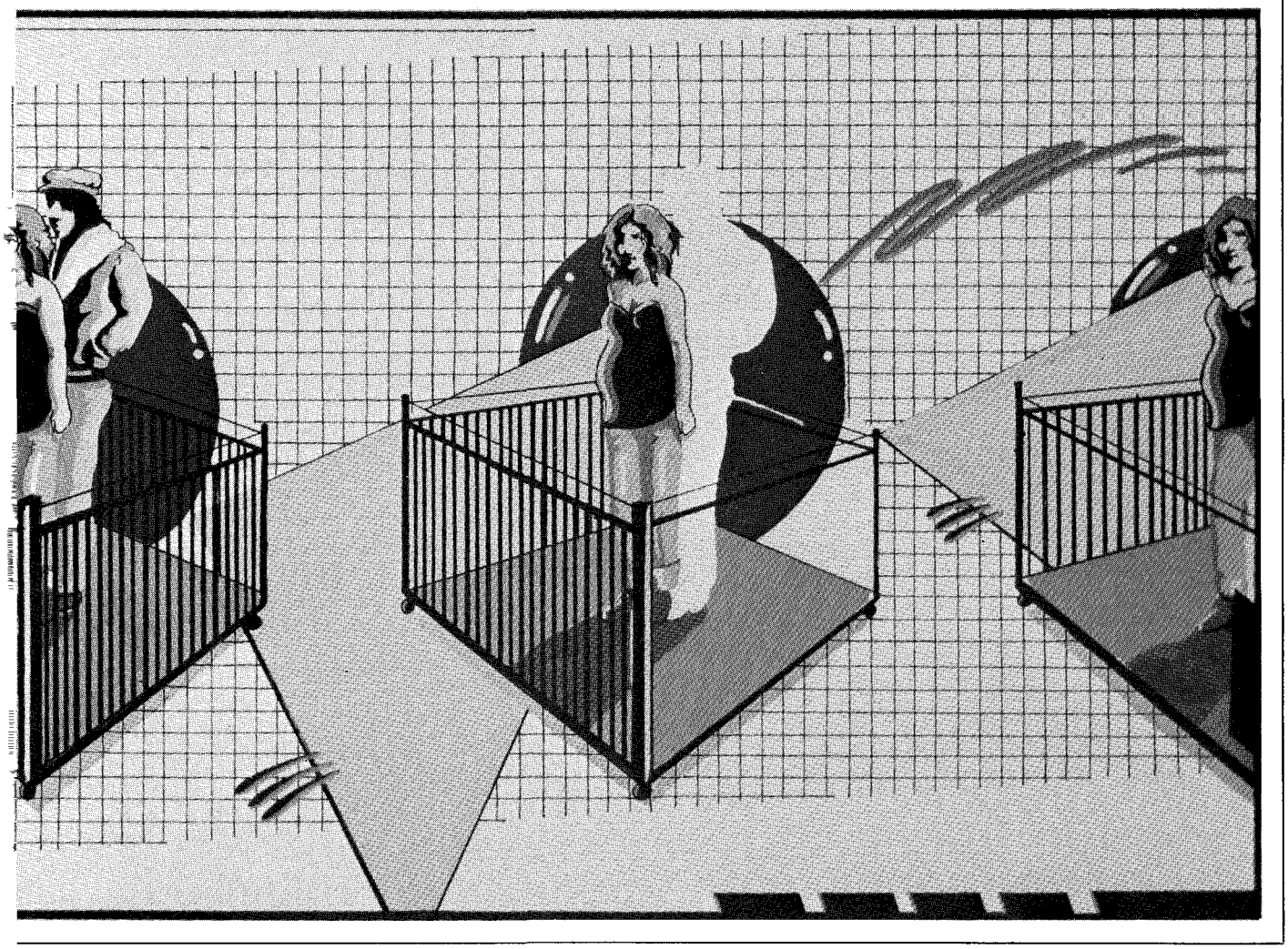

the time. I didn't know anyone like Dot, so I didn't know she was serious.

"I'm gonna bend you out of shape," she said, flexing her hands over me. Her hands were small, broad, capable, with pointed nails. I used to do the wrong thing sometimes when I was drinking, and that time I did the wrong thing even though I was stretched out on the floor beneath her. I started laughing at her because her hands were so small (though strong and determined looking, I should have been more conscious of that). She was about to dive on top of me, five-month belly and all, but Gerry caught her in mid-air and carried her, yelling, out the door. The next day I reported for work. It was my first day on the job, and the only other woman on the construction site besides me was Dot Adare.

The first day Dot just glared toward me from a distance. She worked in the weigh-shack and I was hired to press buttons on the conveyor belt. All I had to do was adjust the speeds on the belt for sand, rocks, or gravel, and make sure it was aimed toward the right pile. There was a pyramid for each type of material, which was used to make hot-mix and cement. Across the wide yard, I saw Dot emerge from the little white shack from time to time. I couldn't tell whether she recognized me and thought, by the end of the day, that she probably didn't. I found out differently the next morning when I went to the company truck for coffee.

She got me alongside of the truck somehow, away from the men. She didn't say a word, just held a buck knife out where I could see it, blade toward me. She jiggled the handle and the tip waved like the pointy head of a pit-viper. Blind. Heat-seeking. I was completely astonished. I had just put the plastic cover on my coffee and it steamed between my hands.

"Well I'm sorry I laughed," I said. She stepped back. I peeled the lid off my coffee, took a sip, and then I said the wrong thing again.

"And I wasn't going after your boyfriend."

"Why not!" she said at once. "What's wrong with him!"

I saw that I was going to lose this argument no matter what I said, so, for once, I did the right thing. I threw my coffee in her face and ran. Later on that day Dot came out of the weighshack and yelled "Okay then!" I was close enough to see that she even smiled. I waved. From then on things were better between us, which was lucky, because I turned out to be such a good button presser that

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within two weeks I was promoted to the weighshack, to help Dot.

It wasn't that Dot needed help weighing trucks, it was just a formality for the State Highway Department. I never quite understood, but it seems Dot had been both the truck-weigher and the truck-weight-inspector for a while, until someone caught wind of this. I was hired to actually weigh the trucks then, for the company, and Dot was hired by the State to make sure I recorded accurate weights. What she really did was sleep, knit, or eat all day. Between truckloads I did the same. I didn't even have to get off my stool to weigh the trucks, because the arm of the scale projected through a rectangular hole and the weights appeared right in front of me. The standard back dumps, belly-dumps, and yellow company trucks eased onto a platform built over the arm next to the shack. I wrote their weight on a little pink slip, clipped the paper in a clothes-pin attached to a broom handle, and handed it up to the driver. I kept a copy of the pink slip on a yellow slip that I put in a metal filebox—no one ever picked up the filebox, so I never knew what the yellow slips were for. The company paid me very well.

It was early July when Dot and I started working together. At first I sat as far away from her as possible and never took my eyes off her knitting needles, although it made me a little dizzy to watch her work. It wasn't long before we came to an understanding though, and after this I felt perfectly comfortable with Dot. She was nothing but direct, you see, and told me right off that only three things made her angry. Number one was someone flirting with Gerry. Number two was a cigarette leech (someone who was always quitting but smoking yours). Number three was a piss-ant. I asked her what that was. "A piss-ant," she said, "is a man with fat buns who tries to sell you things, a Jaycee, an Elk, a Kiwanis." I always knew where I stood with Dot, so I trusted her. I knew that if I fell out of her favor she would threaten me and give me time to run before she tried anything physical.

By mid-July our shack was unbearable, for it drew heat in from the bare yard and held it. We sat outside most of the time, moving around the shack to catch what shade fell, letting the raw hot wind off the beetfields suck the sweat from our armpits and legs. But the seasons change fast in North Dakota. We spent the last day of August jumping from foot to numb foot before Hadji, the foreman, dragged a little column of bottled gas into the shack. He lit the spoked wheel on its head, it bloomed, and from then on we huddled close to the heater—eating, dozing, or sitting blankly in its small radius of dry warmth.

By that time Dot weighed over 200 pounds, most of it peanut-butter cups and egg salad sandwiches. She was a short, broad-beamed woman with long yellow eyes and spaces between each of her strong teeth. When we began working together, her hair was cropped close. By the cold months it had grown out in thick quills—brown at the shank, orange at the tip. The orange dye-job had not suited her coloring. By that time, too, Dot's belly was round and full, for she was due in October. The child rode high, and she often rested her forearms on it while she knitted. One of Dot's most peculiar feats was transforming that gentle task into something perverse. She knit viciously, jerking the yarn around her thumb until the tip whitened, pulling each stitch so tightly that the little garments she finished stood up by themselves like miniature suits of mail.

But I thought that the child would need those tight stitches when it was born. Although Dot, as expecting mother, lived a fairly calm life, it was clear that she had also moved loosely among dangerous elements. The child, for example, had been conceived in a visiting room at the state prison. Dot had straddled Gerry's lap, in a corner the closed circuit TV did not quite scan. Through a hole ripped in her pantyhose and a hole ripped in Gerry's jeans they somehow managed to join and, miraculously, to conceive. When Dot was sure she was pregnant, Gerry escaped from the prison to see her. Not long after my conversation with Gerry in the bar, he was caught. That time he went back peacefully, and didn't put up a fight. He was mainly in the penitentiary for breaking out of it, anyway, since for his crime (assault and battery when he was 18) he had received three years and time off for good behavior. He just never managed to serve those three years or behave well. He broke out time after time, and was caught each time he did it, regular as clockwork.

Gerry was talented at getting out, that's a fact. He boasted that no steel or concrete shitbarn could hold a Chippewa, and he had eel-like properties in spite of his enormous size. Greased with lard once, he squirmed into a six-foot thick prison wall and vanished. Some thought he had stuck there, immured forever, and that he would bring luck like the bones of slaves sealed in the wall of China. But Gerry rubbed his own belly for luck and brought luck to no one else for he appeared, suddenly, at Dot's door and she was hard-pressed to hide him.

She managed for nearly a month. Hiding a six-foot plus two hundred and fifty pound Indian in the middle of a town that doesn't like Indians in the first place isn't easy. A month was quite an accomplishment, when you know what she was up against. She spent most of her time walking to and from the grocery store, padding along on her swollen feet, astonishing the neighbors with the size of what they thought was her appetite. Stacks of pork-chops, whole fryers, thick steaks disappeared overnight and since Gerry couldn't take the garbage out by day sometimes he threw the bones out the windows, where they collected, where dogs soon learned to wait for a hand-out and fought and squabbled over whatever there was.

The neighbors finally complained and one day, while Dot was at work, Lovchik knocked on the door of the trailerhouse. Gerry answered, sighed, and walked over to their car. He was so good at getting out of the joint and so terrible at getting caught. It was as if he couldn't stay out of their hands. Dot knew his problem, and told him that he was crazy to think he could walk out of prison, and then live like a normal person. Dot told him that didn't work. She told him to get lost for a while on the reservation, any reservation, to change his name and although he couldn't grow a beard to at least let the straggly hairs above his lip form a kind of mustache that would slightly disguise his face. But Gerry wouldn't do that. He simply knew he did

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not belong in prison, although he admitted it had done him some good at 18, when he hadn't known how to be a criminal and so had taken lessons from professionals. Now that he knew all there was to know, however, he couldn't see the point of staying in a prison and taking the same lessons over and over. "A hate-factory," he called it once, and said it manufactured black poisons in his stomach that he couldn't get rid of although he poked a finger down his throat and retched and tried to be a clean and normal person in spite of everything.

Gerry's problem, you see, was he believed in justice, not laws. He felt he had paid for his crime, which was done in a drunk heat and to settle the question with a cowboy of whether a Chippewa was also a nigger. Gerry said that the two had never settled it between them, but that the cowboy at least knew that if a Chippewa was a nigger he was sure also a hell of a mean and lowdown fighter. For Gerry did not believe in fighting by any rules but reservation rules, which is to say the first thing Gerry did to the cowboy, after they squared off, was kick his balls.

It hadn't been much of a fight after that, and since there were both white and Indian witnesses Gerry thought it would blow over if it ever reached court. But there is nothing more vengeful and determined in this world than a cowboy with sore balls, and Gerry soon found this out. He also found that white people are good witnesses to have on your side since they have names, addresses, social security numbers, and work phones. But they are terrible witnesses to have against you, almost as bad as having Indians witness for you.

Not only did Gerry's friends lack all forms of identification except their band cards, not only did they disappear (out of no malice but simply because Gerry was tried during powwow time), but the few he did manage to get were not interested in looking judge or jury in the eye. They mumbled into their laps. Gerry's friends, you see, had no confidence in the United States Judicial System. They did not seem comfortable in the courtroom, and this increased their unreliability in the eyes of judge and jury. If you trust the authorities, they trust you better back, it seems. It looked that way to Gerry anyhow.

A local doctor testified on behalf of the cowboy's testicles, and said his fertility might be impaired. Gerry got a little angry at that, and said right out in court that he could hardly believe he had done that much damage since the cowboy's balls were very small targets, it had been dark, and his aim was off anyway because of three, or maybe it was only two, beers. That made matters worse, of course, and Gerry was socked with a heavy sentence for an 18 year old, but not for an Indian. Some said he got off lucky.

Only one good thing came from the whole experience, said Gerry, and that was maybe the cowboy would not have any little cowboys, although, Gerry also said, he had nightmares sometimes that the cowboy did manage to have little cowboys, all born with full sets of grinning teeth, stetson hats, and little balls hard as plum pits.

So you see, it was difficult for Gerry, as an Indian, to retain the natural good humor of his ancestors in these modern circumstances. He tried though, and since he believed in justice, not laws, Gerry knew where he belonged (out of prison, in the bosom of his new family). And in spite of the fact that he was untrained in the honest life, he wanted it. He was even interested in getting a job. It didn't matter what kind of job. "Anything for a change," Gerry said. He wanted to go right out and apply for one, in fact, the moment he was free. But of course Dot wouldn't let him. And so, because he wanted to be with Dot, he stayed hidden in her trailerhouse even though they both realized, or must have, that it wouldn't be long before the police came asking around or the neighbors wised up and Gerry Nanapush would be back at square one again. So it happened. Lovchik came for him. And Dot now believed she would have to go through the end of her pregnancy and the delivery all by herself.

Dot was angry about having to go through it alone, and besides that, she loved Gerry with a deep and true love—that was clear. She knit his absence into thick little suits for the child, suits that would have stopped a truck on a dark road with their colors—bazooka pink, bruise blue, the screaming orange flagmen wore.

The child was as restless a prisoner as his father, and grew more anxious and unruly as his time of release neared. As a place to spend a 9-month sentence in, Dot wasn't much. Her body was inhospitable. Her skin was slack, sallow, and draped like upholstery fabric over her short, boardlike bones. Like the shack we spent our days in, she seemed jerry-built, thrown into the world with loosely nailed limbs and lightly puttied joints. Some pregnant women's bellies look like they always have been there. But Dot's stomach was an odd shape, almost square, and had the tacked-on air of a new and unpainted bay window. The child was clearly ready for a break and not interested in earning his parole for he kept her awake all night by pounding reasonlessly at her inner walls, or beating against her bladder until she swore. "He wants out, bad," poor Dot would groan. "You think he might be premature?" From the outside, anyway, the child looked big enough to stand and walk and maybe even run straight out of the maternity ward the moment he was born.

The sun, at the time, rose around seven and we got to the weigh-shack while the frost was still thick on the gravel. Each morning I started the gas heater, turning the nozzle and standing back, flipping the match at it the way you would feed a fanged animal. Then one morning I saw the red bud through the window, lit already. But when I opened the door the shack was empty. There was, however, evidence of an overnight visitor—cigarette stubs, a few beer cans crushed to flat disks. I swept these things out and didn't say a word about them to Dot when she arrived.

She seemed to know something was in the air, however; her face lifted from time to time all that morning. She sniffed, and even I could smell the lingering odor of sweat like sour wheat, the faint reek of slept-in clothes and gasoline. Once, that morning, Dot looked at me and narrowed her long, hooded eyes. "I got pains," she said, "every so often. Like it's going to come sometime soon. Well all I can say is he better drag ass to get here, that Gerry." She closed her eyes then, and went to sleep.

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Ed Rafferty, one of the drivers, pulled in with a load. It was overweight, and when I handed him the pink slip he grinned. There were two scales, you see, on the way to the cement plant and if a driver got past the state-run scale early, before the state officials were there, the company would pay for whatever he got away with. But it was not illicit gravel that tipped the wedge past the red mark on the balance. When I walked back inside I saw the weight had gone down to just under the red. Ed drove off, still laughing, and I assumed that he had leaned on the arm of the scale, increasing the weight.

"That Ed," I said, "got me again."

But Dot stared past me, needles poised in her fist like a picador's lances. It gave me a start, to see her frozen in such a menacing pose. It was not the sort of pose to turn your back on, but I did turn, following her gaze to the door that a man's body filled suddenly.

Gerry, of course it was Gerry. He'd tipped the weight up past the red and leapt down, cat-quick for all his mass, and silent. I hadn't heard his step. Gravel crushed, evidently, but did not roll beneath his tight, thin boots.

He was bigger than I remembered from the bar, or perhaps it was just that we'd been living in that dollhouse of a weighshack so long I saw everything else as huge. He was so big that he had to hunker one shoulder beneath the lintel and back his belly in, pushing the doorframe wider with his long, soft hands. It was the hands I watched as Gerry filled the shack. His plump fingers looked so graceful and artistic against his smooth mass. He used them prettily. Revolving agile wrists, he reached across the few inches left between himself and Dot. Then his littlest fingers curled like a woman's at tea, and he disarmed his wife. He drew the needles out of Dot's fists, and examined the little garment that hung like a queer fruit beneath.

" 'S very, very nice," he said, scrutinizing the tiny, even stitches. " 'S for the kid?"

Dot nodded solemnly and dropped her eyes to her lap. It was an almost tender moment. The silence lasted so long that I got embarrassed and would have left, had I not been wedged firmly behind his hip in one corner.

Gerry stood there, smoothing black hair behind his ears. Again, there was a queer delicacy about the way he did this. So many things Gerry did might remind you of the way that a beautiful woman, standing naked before a mirror, would touch herself—lovingly, conscious of her attractions. He nodded encouragingly. "Let's go then," said Dot.

Suave, grand, gigantic, they moved across the parking lot and then, by mysterious means, slipped their bodies into Dot's compact car. I expected the car to belly down, thought the muffler would scrape the ground behind them. But instead they flew, raising a great spume of dust that hung in the air a long time after they were out of sight.

I went back into the weighshack when the air behind them had settled. I was bored, dead bored. And since one thing meant about as much to me as another, I picked up her needles and began knitting, as well as I could anyway, jerking the yarn back after each stitch, becoming more and more absorbed in my work until, as it happened, I came suddenly to the end of the garment, snipped the yarn, and worked the loose ends back into the collar of the thick little suit.

I missed Dot in the days that followed, days so alike they welded seamlessly to one another and took your mind away. I seemed to exist in a suspension and spent my time sitting blankly at the window, watching nothing until the sun went down, bruising the whole sky as it dropped, clotting my heart. I couldn't name anything I felt anymore, although I knew it was a kind of boredom. I had been living the same life too long. I did jumping jacks and push-ups and stood on my head in the little shack to break the tedium, but too much solitude rots the brain. I wondered how Gerry had stood it. Sometimes I grabbed drivers out of their trucks and talked loudly and quickly and inconsequentially as a madwoman. There were other times I couldn't talk at all because my tongue had rusted to the roof of my mouth.

Sometimes I daydreamed about Dot and Gerry. I had many choice daydreams, but theirs was my favorite. I pictured them in Dot's long tan and aqua trailerhouse, both hungry. Heads swaying, clasped hands swinging between them like hooked trunks, they moved through the kitchen feeding casually from boxes and bags on the counters, like ponderous animals alone in a forest. When they had fed, they moved on to the bedroom and settled themselves upon Dot's kingsize and sateen-quilted spread. They rubbed together, locked and unlocked their parts. They set the trailer rocking on its cement block and plywood foundation and the tremors spread, causing cups to fall, plates to shatter in the china-hutches of their more established neighbors.

But what of the child there, suspended between them. Did he know how to weather such tropical storms? It was a week past the week he was due, and I expected the good news to come any moment. I was anxious to hear the outcome, but still I was surprised when Gerry rumbled to the weighshack door on a huge and ancient, rust-pocked, untrustworthy-looking machine that was like no motorcycle I'd ever seen before.

"She asst for you," he hissed. "Quick, Get on!"

I hoisted myself up behind him, although there wasn't room on the seat. I clawed his smooth back for a handhold and finally perched, or so it seemed, on the rim of his heavy belt. Fly-like, glued to him by suction, we rode as one person, whipping a great wind around us. Cars scattered, the lights blinked and flickered on the main street. Pedestrians swiveled to catch a glimpse of us—a mountain tearing by balanced on a toy, and clinging to the sheer northwest face, a young and scrawny girl howling something that dopplered across the bridge and faded out, finally, in the parking lot of the Saint Francis Hospital.

In the waiting room we settled on chairs molded of orange plastic. The spike legs splayed beneath Gerry's mass, but managed to support him the four hours we waited. Nurses passed, settling like field gulls among reports and prescriptions, eyeing us with reserved hostility. Gerry hardly

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spoke. He didn't have to. I watched his ribs and the small of his back darken with sweat, for that well-lighted tunnel, the waiting room, the tin rack of magazines, all were the props and inevitable features of institutions. From time to time Gerry paced in the time-honored manner of the prisoner or expectant father. He made lengthy trips to the bathroom. All the quickness and delicacy of his movements had disappeared, and he was only a poor weary fat man in those hours, a husband worried about his wife, menaced, tired of getting caught.

The gulls emerged finally, and drew Gerry in among them. He visited Dot for perhaps half an hour, and then came out of her room. Again he settled; the plastic chair twitched beneath him. He looked bewildered and silly and a little addled with what he had seen. The shaded lenses of his glasses kept slipping down his nose. Beside him, I felt the aftermath of the shockwave, traveling from the epicenter deep in his flesh, outward from part of him that had shifted along a crevice. The tremors moved in widening rings. When they reached the very surface of him, and when he began trembling, Gerry stood suddenly. "I'm going after cigars," he said, and walked quickly away.

His steps quickened to a near-run as he moved down the corridor. Waiting for the elevator, he flexed his nimble fingers. Dot told me she had once sent him to the store for a roll of toilet paper. It was eight months before she saw him again, for he'd met the local constabulary on the way. So I knew, when he flexed his fingers, that he was thinking of pulling the biker's gloves over his knuckles, of running. It was perhaps the very first time in his life he had something to run for.

It seemed to me, at that moment, that I should at least let Gerry know it was all right for him to leave, to run as far and fast as he had to now. Although I felt heavy, my body had gone slack, and my lungs ached with smoke, I jumped up. I signaled him from the end of the corridor. Gerry turned, unwillingly turned. He looked my way just as two of our local police—Officers Lovchik and Harriss, pushed open the firedoor that sealed off the staircase behind me. I didn't see them, and was shocked at first that my wave caused such an extreme reaction in Gerry.

His hair stiffened. His body lifted like a hot-air balloon filling suddenly. Behind him there was a wide, tall window. Gerry opened it and sent the screen into thin air with an elegant, chorus-girl kick. Then he followed the screen, squeezing himself unbelievably through the frame like a fat rabbit disappearing down a hole. It was three stories down to the cement and asphalt parking lot.

Officers Lovchik and Harriss gained the window. The nurses followed. I slipped through the fire exit and took the back stairs down into the parking lot, believing I would find him stunned and broken there.

But Gerry had chosen his window with exceptional luck, for the officers had parked their car directly underneath. Gerry landed just over the driver's seat, caving the roof into the steering wheel. He bounced off the hood of the car and then, limping, a bit dazed perhaps, straddled his bike. Out of duty, Lovchik released several rounds into the still trees below him. The reports were still echoing when I reached the front of the building.

I was just in time to see Gerry Nanapush, emboldened by his godlike leap and recovery, pop a wheelie and disappear between the neat shrubs that marked the entrance to the hospital.

Two weeks later Dot and her boy, who was finally named Jason like most boys born that year, came back to work at the scales. Things went on as they had before, except that Jason kept us occupied during the long hours. He was large, of course, and had a sturdy pair of lungs he used often. When he cried, Jason screwed his face into fierce baby wrinkles and would not be placated with sugar tits or pacifiers. Dot unzipped her parka halfway, pulled her blouse up, and let him nurse for what seemed like hours. We could scarcely believe his appetite. Dot was a diligent producer of milk, however. Her breasts, like overfilled innertubes, strained at her nylon blouses. Sometimes, when she thought no one was looking, Dot rose and carried them in the crooks of her arms, for her shoulders were growing bowed beneath their weight.

The trucks came in on the hour, or half hour. I heard the rush of airbrakes, gears grinding only inches from my head. It occurred to me that although I measured many tons every day, I would never know how heavy a ton was unless it fell on me. I wasn't lonely now that Dot had returned. The season would end soon, and we wondered what had happened to Gerry.

There were only a few weeks left of work when we heard that Gerry was caught again. He'd picked the wrong reservation to hide on—Pine Ridge. At the time it was over-run with Federal Agents and armored vehicles. Weapons were stashed everywhere and easy to acquire. Gerry got himself a weapon. Two men tried to arrest him. Gerry would not go along and when he started to run and the shooting started Gerry shot and killed a cleanshaven man with dark hair and light eyes, a Federal Agent, a man whose picture was printed in all the papers.

They sent Gerry to prison in Marion, Illinois. He was placed in the control unit. He receives his visitors in a room where no touching is allowed, where the voice is carried by phone, glances meet through sheets of plexiglass, and no children will ever be engendered.

Dot and I continued to work the last weeks together. Once we weighed baby Jason. We unlatched his little knit suit, heavy as armor, and bundled him in a light, crocheted blanket. Dot went into the shack to adjust the weights. I stood there with Jason. He was such a solid child, he seemed heavy as lead in my arms. I placed him on the ramp between the wheel-sights and held him steady for a moment, then took my hands slowly away. He stared calmly into the rough, distant sky. He did not flinch when the wind came from every direction, wrapping us tight enough to squeeze the very breath from a stone. He was so dense with life, such a powerful distillation of Dot and Gerry, it seemed he might weigh about as much as any load. But that was only a thought, of course. For as it turned out, he was too light and did not register at all. □

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KENNETH LASH
A LIFE STORY

Barnaby Macklin's kindergarten teacher, Miss Dixon, could break an apple in half with her hands. She got his full attention.

As did the father, Harold, who was fond of losing his temper. The mother, Lillian, did not protect him. Barnaby grew wary.

And weary of school, once past Miss Dixon. He gave his attention to reading under the covers with a flashlight, deep into the night. In school he fell asleep at his desk. They skipped him two grades to wake him up. Thus are scholars sometimes forged.

As are life rhythms. Barnaby was alternately asleep or paying attention, like someone at a concert. But he tended to pay attention in the dark, sleep in the light. Daytime became a dream.

But days pass, regardless of whether you give them attention or not. The Fourth of July dimmed; penny candy gave way to Milky Ways. *The Boy Allies* under the covers gave way to Sir Walter Scott outside them, and those by degrees to Dostoyevsky, once Barnaby left home.

School was a constant. Everything began there: girls, beer, friendships; disillusion, world-weariness—the little dramas of living. Which, it turns out, are all melodramas.

Barnaby never knew that. He thought only Lancelot and Stavrogin and Frank Merriwell lived in melodrama. And poets, of course, forever exaggerating everything. The rest of us just lived lives, mostly asleep in the familiar. Occasionally paying attention when you wanted to, more often paying attention when you had to. A matter of grades always, one way or another.

But still: the world was full of musicians and politicians. Parents, parades, girls in short skirts; policemen, priests, tax-collectors; people crying, moral philosophers. All wanting the same thing—his attention. His allegiance, they meant. What they're really after, Barnaby said, is my heart.

Instead of giving it to anybody he married a rich girl. And beautiful, too. A little hairy around the nipples, but she went regularly to Elizabeth Arden's on Fifth Avenue and had the hairs removed. At night when they walked from one jazz club to another in Greenwich Village she'd put her hand deep in his pants pocket and hold his penis. Sometimes they'd duck into a doorway. Her parents gave them a condominium. She didn't like her parents. After a year or so she didn't like Barnaby either. He forgot her birthday, and didn't think her family was so bad.

The divorce was the first time since childhood, when he didn't know the word, that Barnaby felt himself a part of melodrama. He didn't like it at all. It was alien. He escaped back into school, promotion, the company of

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KENNETH LASH is an NAR contributing editor.

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men, the comfort of girls. But in Arizona now, a crowded desert ringed with purple mountains' majesty. Indians, Mexicans, moon landscapes. He bought a dog and taught it a little Spanish. He became a teacher. He grew a beard and wore blue jeans. He also wore a camel's hair overcoat and traveled with matched leather luggage, both brought from the east, from the old days. He became brilliant and charming, and a threat to his colleagues. They called him not serious. So did the girls, but only after the fact.

Take what you want, God says, and pay for it. All of us looking through the glass at life's candy counter, hand in pocket or purse secretly counting our change. I'll take one of these, two of those. . . .

Barnaby was sitting on a mountainside in Globe, Arizona, wary of rattlesnakes, composing a poem in his head. He had been fired. Let go. Receiving a Rockefeller grant in Literature had been the last straw. For the members of his English department prodigies were to be analyzed, not lived with. "Heroes are to be used, not kept," Barnaby said to himself. "Not kept, that's what I mostly feel." He was on his way to Los Angeles to become a screenwriter. It was an act of revenge.

Charm is a great can-opener. So are good looks. But they're both undiscriminating, broad-spectrum. They open equally macadamia nuts or worms. Barnaby was hired by a spectacularly successful screen-writer, who was in the act of incorporating herself. While she was at it she thought she might as well incorporate Barnaby too, which she did, and though he could write and screw he couldn't seem to kiss her, and without being kissed she couldn't wake from her sleep. Her husband, who evidently didn't kiss her either, was nonetheless of royal Hollywood blood, a mogul with a bad temper. Periodically the Beverly Hills police had to bring him into the station for the night, which was a nuisance because it meant that one of them caught the assignment of playing gin rummy in the cell until sun-up, bail. Barnaby had rented a house on Malibu beach and bought a sea-green Porsche. When the husband found the house he broke into it and smeared blood—probably his own—on the walls. After that, Barnaby slept with a fireplace poker beside him in bed. He would have preferred a starlet, but found that astrology was all their conversation. Immediately upon being introduced, they asked him his sign. It was like being in the Secret Service. He hated it, nothing made any sense. Wanting had got him here, and the anger of not mattering enough no matter what you do or don't do, no matter what you give your heart to. . . .

Barnaby wrote a one-act play about Man, the Wanting Animal. He put it in his Porsche and left, to San Francisco. On the Blaupunkt he began to hear psychotherapy broadcast between commercials.

"My problem is my brother. Or probably you'll say it's my wife, or maybe even me, I suppose, but I can't help the way I feel about him, can I, I mean it started way back when we were kids, we didn't know any better, can I be blamed for that? My wife says what she is doing is helping me, she's going to remove the temptation. She's removing it all right, they're off together somewhere right now, this minute while I'm talking to you, and Danny and I were supposed to go to Tahoe this weekend, there's a special. . . . Listen, I don't know what to do, I really don't, I don't even know where to start. Can you help me? . . ."

Barnaby saw at once the difference between Los Angeles and San Francisco. In Los Angeles, they wrote this stuff; in San Francisco they lived it. He found himself in the grip of desire. The desire not to be alone. At first he thought he'd come to the right place, San Francisco-Berkeley-Marin. Come right in. What's your story, not what's your sign. The hills and curving roads made for smaller cars; the bay brought the sea down to size. Norma, at the Actor's Workshop, was very good-looking. She enthused over his play and took him to her house in Mill Valley to hear his life story. Then she told him hers at greater length, to explain how she had finally arrived at being laid back, which she then proved. But after a week they read the paper or watched television during meals. Aside from the morning and evening check on how they felt, there seemed little to talk about, as if over the years they'd exhausted their sources of conversation. By the time he met Meredith he'd solved the dilemma.

Instead of poems and plays, Barnaby now wrote stories. Or rather a life story. His own. Extended, deepened, intensified. And most of all open-ended. Like soap opera. He borrowed family sisters from Chekhov, rakes and failed clerics from Dostoyevsky, comic figures from Shakespeare. He rendered them modern, mundane, and in exquisite detail. He became much in demand at dinner parties, and gave great numbers of Bay Area people their first experience of listening. Barnaby was, by and large, receiving more attention than he paid. At last.

But it wasn't enough. Even when he was hired by State and had 160 students every day listening to him and looking at him, it wasn't enough. His play was produced and it wasn't enough. Meredith adored him and was rich and it wasn't enough. He felt as if he were dreaming it all. He ran away from it and became a farmer.

Barnaby knew that farming may have been poetic for Robert Frost but was all calluses and calculations for a real farmer. He didn't know it might be hell, too, on top of a chicken coop in high summer, the tarpaper melting, the chickens smelling, sickening, pecking at each other's bared pinkness; sheep following each other off a cliff—plop! plop! Snakes in the feedbin, holes in the fences, cows so dumb you could die looking into the sweetness of their eyes. And shit everywhere. He'd lower himself into the porch swing of an evening, listen to it creak, look out at the stars, and smell shit. He had always hated the word, detested its general use. Now he wasn't so sure. Maybe people didn't so much say it as echo it. Maybe as we stumbled around in life, feeding this, patching that, burying the other, our hearts became caked with it. Giving rise to our insistent illusions . . . the necessary perfume. Truth as myth, myth as deodorant. . . .

Barnaby knew he was not a farmer, could never be one. Farming would never be natural to him. And thus it demanded his constant attention. Like Samuel Beckett, Irishman, writing in French. You couldn't lean on old tricks, you couldn't charm a fencepost. So he kept at it, got help from the state ag agents, from the men at the Co-op, from U.S. Government pamphlets, from hired

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hands. He didn't fail. He lived with unending suspense, but he didn't fail.

"I got a D," he said to Meredith, after selling the farm.

"All that work, just for a D?" she said.

"It's more than my father could have done!" Barnaby said.

With the money from the sale, he left for Europe. He had never traveled there before. It was a present he was giving himself for hard work.

He went first to France, where he was cheated but not robbed. Then to Italy, where he was robbed but not cheated. Then to Spain, where he was treated with dignity and warmth but got into trouble by interfering with some children who were torturing an animal. He ended his tour in Scotland and England. He saw the lochs of Sir Walter Scott, the lakes of the poets, the mists and the manicured countryside where the sheep seem to have been placed on the hills by painters. It was all as the books foretold; the wonder was in the familiarity. Barnaby felt as if he'd been brought up here, yet it was not his home. Some kind of mistake, a time warp. To correct it would require a further bending, into the life of an expatriate.

I am no T.S.
Eliot nor was meant to be

he wrote Meredith, announcing his imminent return.

They lived together, with less and less to say to each other after Barnaby ended his tales of travel and Meredith her store of local happenings. They watched television, made erratic love, worried about robberies and their health. There was plenty of money. Barnaby devoted himself to writing, with no need to earn anything from it. He developed a peculiar, polished style which everyone seemed to admire and no one to read.

He lived well
as life passed him by

he wrote one day, working on a collection of epitaphs. The inspiration for the work had come from Meredith, and her suggestion that they have an "open marriage."

"We're not married," Barnaby said.

"You know what I mean," she said.

He did. Another ending to live through. There was some question in his mind about whether the human had yet evolved the adaptive traits required by contemporary mobility. We're still not through being fish.

Lives dart as if here
and there were different
in the circular bowl

He didn't feel like writing poetry. He didn't feel like going to restaurants or films or ball games. He didn't feel like cracking jokes or walking the dog. He felt like crying, but the small relief wasn't worth it. If it weren't for a weak stomach he'd have considered becoming an alcoholic: only in drink did he become companionable. Forgiving. After the fourth drink he forgave even death, which was not the same as opting for it with hard drugs.

He was walking around the garden thinking these things. It had rained, bringing out the spicy smell of eucalyptus, the astonishing sweetness of orange blossoms. Meredith came in through the gate, babbling about her session with Dr. Hartley.

Barnaby called and made an appointment. He had never gone to a psychotherapist. Where did one begin?

"I feel like a waltzing spirit in a punk-rock world," he said.

Dr. Hartley nodded, settled back into his chair.

There was a long silence. Finally Barnaby said, "Can you break an apple in half with your bare hands?"

"No, I don't think so," Dr. Hartley said, "why?"

"Because if you can, you'll get my attention."

The psychotherapist's eyelids lifted, he leaned forward.

Barnaby settled back and began his story. There was no reason it couldn't last seven or eight years. □

MORDECAI MARCUS

RACK AND CANE

Out of the past
a clothes tree
lifts its boughs.
Tracing the corner
of a varnished flooring,
I squirrel up towards
what I've sought
in the dark here: my
father's cane.

Our walks come back. I
hand him the knobby wood,
knowing but never saying
it lends his walk no spring,
as it goes with him
like the tap of speech:
Right! Right! Right!

We pace the blank
segments of streets.
Droplets of sweet-sour wisdom
map his rise
from my empty plane.

The darkness here
snaps the tree shut.
Back there
my dampened strides
edge towards a run.

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CAROLE PAUL

HOUSE OF MIRRORS

All day Thursday while her husband Robert is in Philadelphia presenting the paper on 18th Century French Poets, Barbara Holland shops, looking for the perfect dress. The dress that will make her feel taller, look younger and be impeccably tasteful. If Robert is pleased he might take her out to dinner when he comes home on Saturday.

In her search she goes from store to store. In from sun-hot pavement, to hushed, carpeted interiors. She gathers her arms full of dresses and suits, the hangers rattle against her legs when she walks. In mirrored cubicles, she pulls silks and linens over her damp, fevered body, but she has forgotten how she is supposed to look.

"Really, lady," the clerk at Spencer's, the final store, says, her voice flat with disgust, "You've seen the entire stock at least twice."

She sees herself walk back to the station wagon and is frightened by a feeling of disconnection. She noticed that odd sensation of being fragmented while standing in front of a brightly lit, three-way mirror. She wore a red silk dress, garish in the harsh fluorescence. Her face, paper white and frightened, stared back at her and, disoriented, she was unable to distinguish between right or left, her mirror image so confused her.

The car is very hot, scorching vinyl clings to the back of her thighs. She looks out over the hood where small heat waves distort the air above the metal surface, writhing, and watches the dance for a long time until the glare of steel-reflected sun clouds her eyes.

She eases the car out of its slot and into a line of others leaving town at five o'clock. It's cooler now with the windows down. In the back, Robert's good, dark suit, fresh from the cleaner's, hangs on a hook; the plastic bag snaps in the wind.

While the light is red, she turns the radio dial and music and talk burst out at her. She twists the knob and watches the small, red indicator line move back and forth across the black numbers. Voices rise and fall meaninglessly before she turns the radio off.

She wonders if Robert will call tonight or if she should perhaps call him. It occurs to her that she doesn't know where he is staying.

Yesterday as he packed, she curled on the bed watching. He hates her to pack for him, says his shirts are always crumpled and once she forgot to put in socks. He had worked quickly, efficiently, moving between the bed and

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chest. He told her the name of the hotel where he had reservations, but at that moment she discovered a beam of early morning sunlight coming through the curtains, had watched lint drift upward through the shaft of light, and noticed a small flap of flesh standing up on Robert's knuckle where he scraped his hand getting the suitcase down from the closet shelf. One tiny drop of blood seeped through the torn skin and lay pink in the folds of his knuckle. She watched his lips move as he talked, concentrated on the tiny chip in his front tooth. Had he always drawn his mouth up so tightly when he talked? He finished speaking. "Did you get all that?" he asked, watching her with suffering eyes. "Yes," she lied and let her eyes slide away from his.

When the light changes to green, she turns the car onto Baker Street. For a few chilling seconds, while her hands grip the wheel too hard and the car moves ahead at a careful twenty-five miles an hour, she imagines their house—sees white siding and black shutters, lush green grass and neatly-trimmed hedges, but, suddenly, can't remember how to get there.

Now her mouth is dry with familiar panic. She wakes so early in the mornings now, too early; the air still night-cool and only a few birds are calling in the woods. She lies there gripping the top edge of the blanket, afraid to open her eyes, afraid she won't recognize her surroundings, afraid the even-breathing weight on the bed beside her will look at her with a stranger's eyes.

In minutes, she recognizes her intersection and makes a smooth right turn. She's nearly calm except her knees feel like water and her hands ache on the wheel.

The house is cool and dark after the brassy sun. The living room smells faintly of furniture polish and rug shampoo. Alma, the cleaning woman, has come and gone. Alma the silent, the capable, hired by Robert to give some order to their home when she was unable to do so. Alma, whose wrinkled, water-roughened hands move over Barbara's furniture with ownership and authority, cutting a wide path through dust as grey as ashes with a soft cloth and a quick spray of Endust.

Walnut shelves that hold the pottery gleam. Yesterday's unread *New York Times* is folded neatly in the magazine rack—headlines interest her.

EMBASSY MILITANTS CALL FOR MASS RALLY
HIGH OFFICIALS SUBJECT OF
BRIBERY INVESTIGATION

She's attracted by the neat, orderly look of black letters against the white page.

Her reflection in the polished, vacant eye of the television is distorted. The image—tiny, squeezed so small it seems she might burst open.

Not Robert's fault really, she is careful to remind herself, that she has always been so anxious to please, obsessed with pleasing Robert—however often she fails—until she is not sure where Robert leaves off and she begins. She floats—lost—and worries that he loves her because she is so malleable, afraid that he will not love her if she is otherwise.

Her yellow silk scarf draped over the Scandinavian leather chair surprises her. Tilting her head to the side, she studies the film of yellow against the brown chair and decides it pleases her. It looks so confident.

Glass shines and tables glow with polish, pillows are fluffed and plump and the nap is up on the rug. A beautiful room. She lights a cigarette from the pack on the coffee table and settles against the couch cushions, then sits up and looks around nervously. A white china ashtray is missing—but she sees it on the bookcase and relaxes.

At six o'clock she eats crackers and cheese and a few of the fat red cherry tomatoes that she loves so. Always careful of crumbs, she eats standing by the kitchen sink. The kitchen is in order, cool and gleaming. The floor shines—a mirror reflecting the oak trestle table and chairs—a hazy, beautiful, upside down world. She is momentarily transfixed.

She never really cooks anymore, never makes the spicy shrimp curry or the Hungarian chicken or any of the other dishes that now seem too messy or so much work. Now, they take their dinner guests to good restaurants.

After dinner, as if at a party for herself, she withdraws a single wine glass from the china closet in the dining room. The crystal is delicate, a frozen cobweb. She pours a small amount of the amber Spanish sherry from the decanter on the table. While she holds the glass to the light, loving the way it breaks the ray into separate points of luminous color, she realizes she has eaten her meal, but tasted none of it.

She is standing near the sideboard and the scary silver coffee service Robert's mother gave them. Coffee urn, creamer and sugar bowl on a heavy silver-plate tray, ornately carved around the edge. Cherubs peer out at her from between boughs of flowers and grapes, obscene, plump. They smile.

The evening air is cool and fresh now. The smell of it pulls her outside. Hollyhocks at the bottom of the garden are almost hidden in the dusk. On the wall a wisteria vine drips blossoms as lush and purple as fall grapes, the heady scent—too sweet.

The Cat-With-No-Name sits on the cool flagstones, tail curled around its body, the tip twitching. It appeared one evening two months ago just before dark and, while it comes nightly, it still doesn't belong to them. Its fur is a strange gray and black tangle. Cautious, it is distrustful of sudden movement. The cat sleeps under the garage, they believe.

It has eaten the sardines she put down by the door on a folded square of tinfoil. Soon it moves by her chair, body low, tail down as if about to dodge a sudden attack. She reaches down on impulse and picks it up, her palms cradling its ribs. The eyes are large and yellow and hard as glass beads. The cat dangles awkwardly from her hands.

She brings its face close until she smells the rancidness of fish; its heart thumps against her palms. She looks into those eyes. The cat stares flatly back at her for seconds, then kicks with strong hind legs, lunging.

She loosens her grasp and the cat slips from her hands like mercury.

It's late; she's tired but not sleepy. She moves through the dark house, palms smoothing walls, hands groping for the cool wood of doorways. She switches on a lamp in the den looking for the book that will put her to sleep.

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Robert's desk. Smooth walnut surface, blue stone mug holding eight finely sharpened pencils, and the brown metal box containing three by five cards filled with precise handwriting—Robert's research. He is analyzing an 18th Century French novel linguistically. For months he has been dissecting its prose, extracting and analyzing, until the novel is bones in a brown metal file box.

How can he do it? she wondered in their early days. The cryptic notes scribbled in book margins. All those small white cards—stacked beside his breakfast plate, on the table by the armchair, and even on the nightstand—cards containing references to earlier notes on older cards, those long ago bound with elastics and stacked in date order in desk drawers and brown boxes in the dusty attic. How can he cut apart like that, critically analyzing, seeking flaws? She hasn't wondered about this for a long while now. Robert is difficult, exacting. He analyzes her as he does his literary projects. She is a dissected paragraph, a sentence fragment, a misplaced reference.

Nothing on the book shelves attracts her and she goes upstairs after switching on the hall lights. In the narrow hall, walls press too closely. She feels that something is opening to let her pass, then slowly folding behind. And it reminds her of her life, how she has slipped through her days as a knife through water.

A long mirror hangs at the foot of the hall. She sees her face and, behind, the expensive wallpaper with the delicate imprint of ferns, the rosewood chest and the blue bowl of almost life-like carnations. To the right is the bedroom door, the foot of their bed, and beyond, the big deep chair with three books stacked on the wide arm. Her vanity table is angled so that its mirror reflects her back and the face looking out from the hall glass. The cycle repeats itself as a mirror reflecting a woman looking in a mirror which, in turn, reflects the original mirror, and through it all, disjointed images of rosewood chests, blue bowls and waxy carnations.

Sometime toward morning the air turns sharp. The sky has lightened to pale gray and the sound of the tree toads in the field beyond the house is replaced by the early morning chatter of birds. She touches the lace neckline of her yellow nightgown, moves to where the sheet is cool, and sleeps.

In her dream, she hears a noise at the heavy front door, a gentle rustling. With great effort, she pushes the door open wide and something as soft as a robin's wing brushes her cheek and moves into the house.

Then, warmth unfolds in a cold, dark place, rising shimmering about to surface—almost there, elusive as a forgotten line of poetry that hangs just beyond recall. And she waits for what she knows must come now, memories of being intact, whole, and feelings, sharp and clear.

The dream wakes her and she sits by the window a long time watching the sun come up over Parson's woods. She draws her legs underneath her gown against the chill and lights a cigarette.

She watches the match flare briefly, flame shooting high with a gentle hiss. Bright orange and blue, the fire condenses and moves down the match. The tip glows and the stem turns black. The flame is a small wisp of heat when it reaches her two fingers—hard, pure blue against the skin.

Before she drops the match in the crystal ashtray, she concentrates hard on the pain in her burning fingers. She concentrates on pain. □

PETER FOLLANSBEE

PANTOUM: THE SALMON LADDER

The river rushes down.
The salmon swimming up,
leaping in the light
up another rung.

The salmon swimming up
one tier to a pool.
Up another rung
to a waterfall.

One tier to a pool,
the river rushes down
to a waterfall
leaping in the light.

The river rushes down.
The salmon swimming up,
leaping in the light,
up another rung.

The salmon swimming up
one tier to a pool.
Up another rung
to a waterfall.

One tier to a pool,
the river rushes down
to a waterfall
leaping in the light.

The river rushes down.
The salmon swimming up,
leaping in the light,
up another rung.

The salmon swimming up,
leaping in the light,
up another rung.
The river rushes down.

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RICHARD CURREY lives and writes in New Mexico. His Crossing Over: A Vietnam Journal *(Applewood) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize last year.*

RICHARD CURREY

SOUVENIR MERCY

I went into the shop late in the day. A short bald man came out from behind a desk at the back of the store and asked if he could help me. I didn't look at him, but into the display case in front of me. I pointed at a pistol on the back row, black steel with a grained wooden butt. That one, I said. He selected a key from several and pulled it out of a reel clipped to his belt on an arm's length silver chain and opened the rear of the cabinet. Yes sir he said, a Walther PPK. German built. An excellent handgun. He laid it on the roof of the case. Does it work, I asked. I looked into his face and his eyes were serious and questioning. Sir, he said, may I ask your intentions for this item? Is this for household security? I watched him a moment; his bald head was shining, reflecting the streetlight from the coming darkness outside. No, I said.

Now I am in my mother's house.

I respect my mother's house, I live in it quietly, in my basement room, I destroy nothing here. I use her bathroom, looking at the green velvet fleur-de-lis on the walls; I clean the kitchen after every use. She works and I am alone all day in her house, in the breezy silence of an American suburb sitting in the vast ease of her sofa watching soap operas, at other times talk shows with blonde actresses, or scientists, or generals. During the day with my mother at work I can turn off the heat and open the doors and windows to let the wind move and snow flurry into the rooms, and I sit against the cold, listening to the gun in its hiding place.

I left the war from Cam Ranh Bay on two canes, standing in a line for the truck that would take us to the airstrip. There were men around on crutches, in wheelchairs, some trying to be cheerful. We endured the ride to the plane without speaking, afraid we could hate each other. After I came back my father would talk about coming home from World War II, from the Pacific: the bands, the parades, confetti in his oiled hair and jitterbugging at The Roseland, the small town welcoming its two or three with banners strung from telephone poles and dances at the high school. When he returned to his home town in Kentucky they gave him a parade and he rode in the back of a 1945 Cadillac convertible donated by a mining boss for the occasion. The mayor sat next to him and they waved at the people on the sidewalks and he said when they got to the end of Main Street that back seat was full of flowers and pennies. Every man a hero he told me.

My first gun was with my father, visiting his friend Lawson in the country, ex-Marine with fat beagles and a gaunt wife, two freckled daughters with bright orange hair and small sun-yellowed faces all corners, sharp and worried. The wives sat together on lawn chairs while Lawson turned hamburgers on a grill and the dogs boiled around a spent basketball, his daughters and my sisters whirling over a backyard swingset.

It was in the slow tide after food that Lawson waved me over to his patio and put a rifle in my hands.

The heft was more than I expected, the deep smell of oil. What you think, he asked. I looked at him and my father joined us, uncomfortable, saying to Lawson He's never handled one of these before. Oh hell, Lawson said, admonishing, time he learned.

Lawson led us down a road toward a treeline, talking guns while the sun got longer across the woods and trail. The sound of water grew louder and Lawson turned abruptly to the south, towards the sound, jerking his head to show we should follow. The three of us pressed single file across a short thicket and emerged on a creek's bank above a still black pool, primary stream passing lighter on the far edge of the deeper water. Lawson threw two cans into the pool and pushed the butt of the rifle I'd carried against my clavicle, positioned my left arm out along the stock and put his finger over mine on the trigger. It seemed a long time before the report, the noise terrifying me and the recoil bruising my shoulder, water opening a

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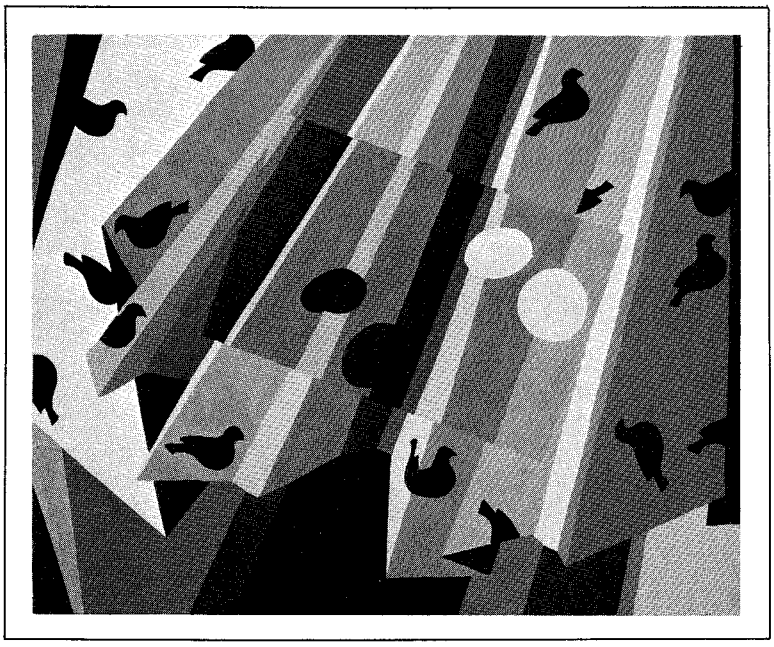

thick *plop*, vibrato of the echo spreading away from us through the trees like the concentric circles easing away and larger from where the bullet eyed the water. My father took aim and hit a can on first round: a hole appeared and it buckled as if a force were pulling from inside. Lawson matched with the other can, missing at first and laughing about it. They fired for several minutes, until heavy smoke hung around their heads and the ground was bright with brass shell casings and it was when they stopped, echoes draining off, one can sunk and the other full of water, that we saw the squirrel on the opposite bank. Tremulous, it froze on the face of the tree when Lawson said Well goddam, look at that. My father whispered It must think we can't see it and I watched its wet stare and shoulders heaving with breath. Lawson raised his rifle, aimed, his bullet nailing the squirrel to the bark, thorax pasted down with a slush of blood and yellow matter, head pinioned up and out by the blow, eyes stuck open in shock.

Then the body loosened, and fell into the underbrush.

My father looked at me, uncertain, said weakly Come on Laws, you didn't need to do that. Lawson laughed, cradled his rifle and turned to go.

There is a dream.

Again and again I am riding a Huey gunship over verdant forest at tree-level, branches rushing below the helicopter's skids. A sudden clearing: a military truck moves through the jungle. The aircraft rises and turns, pitched sky and angled clouds. The chopper sinks to tree-level again and the clearing emerges from the opposite side. The truck in sight, rockets seem to drift away from me and disappear. The truck sags and lists like a wounded bear, a sharp flare kicking from somewhere underneath. A man gets out on fire, falls face first beside the truck as it explodes in flame and impotent light, and I wake to dissolve the sound up through the beaten heated air of my stagnant winter bedroom, awake to the silence, furnace's dry murmur humming the floors.

I sit on the side of the bed breathing blankly in the close heat, thinking of the gun. I can imagine the feeling of the pistol in my hand, the stunted kick it would push into my palm as it fired. I might start with the windows of the house, one by one, trying to place each bullet on a perfect axis so the pane would collapse as its center of gravity disappears. I might try to kill a bird, but would miss, as two or three children stop their bicycles in front: an old storm draining off at the end of the sky and my mother's frightened voice muffled from inside the house, me alone on the green expanse of lawn with the gun and the silent children.

I get up and pull the gun from the closet, from its resting place in a box of old toys, and put it on the bed. The barrel refracts the available light, dim silver-blue against a cloud-colored sheet. Not touching the gun there, not yet, afraid for the way it knows me: sad brother of the tombs, a drowned souvenir, sheltered and homeless and I look at it there, thinking how a sinister thing remains innocent in its heart, carrying the painful weight of its own simple breath.

Remembering Mexico and the spine of its dusty moon, the vacancy of my days, destitute and waiting for some unspecified revolution. I was discharged in a room full of strangers in southern California, never called home that I was back, rode a bus south across supermarkets, apartment towns, drive-ins, shopping centers. It was another earth, the sadness of trains and a heavy sky over cool morning haze.

I rode on to the border, the bus waved through by a dark man in stained khakis. When I got off it was only because I had awakened suddenly in my own sweat, some noise or a hand on my shoulder, stepping off the coach into a wind filled with fish and guava and frying plantain. On the street in front of the bus station harlequins were dancing and a hooker in red pumps and a skirt slit to the waist moved her plastic lips in Spanish.

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The first instinct was redemption in my tiny bed of months, the tired coming of skin limp in that moist air and breath purling toward a stationary heart slung into empty wisdom, always asking for more but never saying how much. My hand on her dark breast was a waving embrace and I wanted to believe it was the life of my mind that carried me, a mystical drift, smoke-filled and guided, time a tired lecher healed by nothing, a false hope. She stood smiling at me in the half-shadow, shining wet from a shower and her skin the color of old bells, burnished.

She slept as I sat at an open window, watching the funeral processions make their slow two-steps, cymbals and mysterious horns, costumed angels and children marching with crosses. Sirens curved out of the hot air in the distance and the desert smoldered along the earth's rim beyond the city. She would stir in the copper light behind me, call me softly in her easy Mexican and I never answered, long winds sliding the lavender sky, moving in my hair, washing the black streets.

Dawn, the softest blue cold, snow-filled windows. I take the gun from its place and see it is the color of dawn, and aging. I dress quietly, lacing combat boots over gray wool socks, and put on the gloves with the fingers cut out. I load the pistol, disengage the safety, step out into winter.

Walking, cracking frozen snow to the street and turn north. The walking goes faster, towards the center of town, the gun a heaviness hanging head-down in my right hand.

Through town, across the square, passing the ice-blistered statue of a frontier woman and child gazing west, until the walking has become a run, rows of Victorian houses toward the last snowfield beyond them before the river.

Running, into the field, one knee riding the chest closer to water, pushing the pistol out and back as my arms pump, the dry harvest shaved stubble breaking out of the firn, brown motes across two white acres as I drive to the edge running too fast not to crash through buried thistle and willow-fall, skidding the incline and onto the river's frozen face, seat of my pants whirring the sandpaper ice.

I lose the pistol: it slides ten feet further to the translucent crystal in the middle of the stream, stopping there, spinning.

I look out at its black shape on the ice for a moment before I try to get up, and as I do I fall back to one knee. I begin to crawl toward the gun, my bones groaning into the cold, halfway there when I hear the ice ache. I spread-eagle, pushing with my toes until my finger is on the distant steel, through the trigger loop, ear flat against the river.

I lie on the ice a long time.

I lie floating, breathing, tracing the spirals of freeze just beyond my face, tension and panic blowing away from my body like things lighter than air, head turned into the water-course hearing the curl and music below the ice and feeling its rough bite on my cheek, carried by the river into something huge and ancient, my body melting in the planet's perfect silence.

I lie on the ice a long time waiting to move. When I do I drag the pistol's dry scrape in front of me by a fingertip to a place I can stand, where the ice is opaque, a smooth white, and I get up.

Standing, the river's hard arm at my feet, my body gone tired and anxious and suddenly I throw the gun, hard as I can, hatred or longing, some final loss of rage or fear or regret, I don't know, moving so fast through me my skull opens and burns. The pistol arches the sky and begins its descent, faster with the far bank rising behind it, hits thin ice with no sound I can hear, gone inside the dark water.

Walking back I look at the hills and the sharp trees and the quiet streets for the face I knew, the house I remember, the one open thing that will hold me and take me into its rest. There was a lover before I left, we met first in these fields, underground animals heard us and led us into their generous heat. We met first in this field, a pasture, under a knot of maples, always the children's first bed together. Too full of red wine we fell into each other, passed the wine from mouth to mouth while the world opened above us, a last cape of darkness floating north and away and autumn birds, distant ravens, calling a song from the deep air.

I sit now in my mother's long winter house, on the porch in the snow watching facets of light on the opposite ridge, at the windows patterning crystals on the glass with my breath.

I sit in my mother's bedroom, on her bed, looking at the pictures she keeps in an octagonal box, burgundy-colored and tied with a red velvet cord. There are pictures of her as a young woman, posing with me in front of the back end of a truck. There is the series taken at my great-grandfather's house, a shambling gray farmhouse on the edge of a small city sided by his thin garden, backed by a red barn. He was near death when I knew him, top shock of hair still auburn and shaved across the temples in the manner of the railroaders of his time. His pocket watch was tarnished by then and had two lids: one opened to the silent face of his first wife, black hair and clouded eyes and the actual sound of her voice forgotten to him. When he opened that lid a song began to tinkle steadily, with hollows between the notes his life seemed to fall into as he listened. The other side was the clock, Roman numerals walking a soft circle and the tick louder than I thought would be possible, rushing out from under the engraved locomotive as he pushed it up with his square thumb.

One day in late summer he sat me on his cow for my mother to take a picture, but that scene is not here in the box. There is a picture of me standing next to him as he turns out of the frame, as if he changed his mind just before the shutter went.

At the bottom of the box, out of time, is the standard military portrait taken as I graduated from recruit training. Expressionless: no fatigue, no relief. No terror. No memory, the life behind me riding towards a vanishing point and calling a last time out of the photographic distance of years, excavating some lost and private child, all my faces gone in me. Night's an epiphany, and welcomes me like an exhausted brother. The shadows are kindest here.□

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Roy Behrens, the NAR's design editor, teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His book on Art and Camouflage *was published last year, and he has now completed* The Poetry of Sight: Design in the Visual Arts.

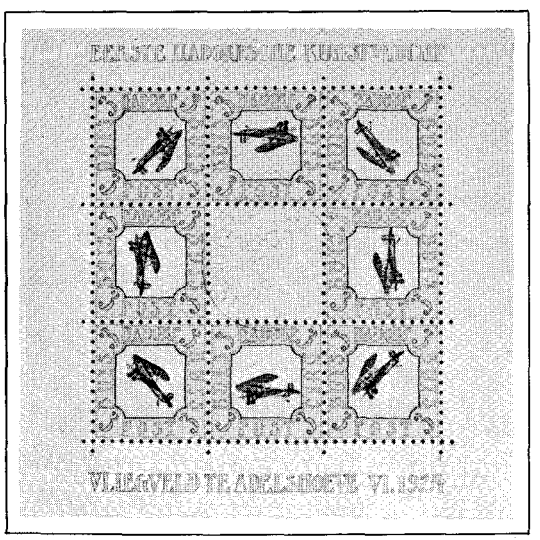
ROY R. BEHRENS

MAKING HISTORY

THE ART OF MOCK-DOCUMENTATION

"The history of modern art is the recurring story of making art resemble non-art. Nothing is more exclusively non-art in our age than science, so that art which is the mimesis of science is a logical development of this modern aesthetic."

Beauvais Lyons



Donald Evans. Stunt-flying stamps from Nadorp, issued 1924. Completed c. 1972. Watercolor, 4 ¾ ×5". Private collection, New York. From W. Eisenhart, The World of Donald Evans *(NYC: Harlan Quist, 1980).*

The American watercolorist Donald Evans was born in 1945, three weeks after the bombing of Hiroshima, four months after Hitler died. Thirty-one years later, in a comparatively uneventful year except for *Annie Hall* and the infamous Buffalo snowstorm, he perished in a fire in Amsterdam.

Luckily, most or all his works remain and some have now been published in Willy Eisenhart's *The World of Donald Evans* (Harlan Quist, 1981), which looks like a philatelist's album with hand-painted postage stamps glued to large black pages.

Evans painted "pseudo-stamps," thousands of them. He did not forge existing stamps, as did the illusionist painters of 19th century Philadelphia, including William Harnett, John Peto, and Jefferson David Chalfant (who glued an actual two-cent stamp beside his imitation, in a work called *Which Is Which?).* Evans does not *trompe l'oeil* within less than several feet—his forte was inventing.

For five years before his death, Donald Evans "issued" stamps from imagined countries. *Nadorp* (Dutch for "the other side of town") issued birds' eggs, airplanes, and Dutch apples. *Sabot* published mushroom stamps. *Achterdijk* commemorated windmills, *Domino* dominoes. Sometimes these were franked with finely carved eraser stamps. Always they were series, rendered precisely in actual size and just as carefully labeled. He even developed a *Catalogue of the World,* a mock philatelist's handbook of all the stamps he issued (with fictional dates of issue and sundry preposterous data) from forty-two fanciful places.

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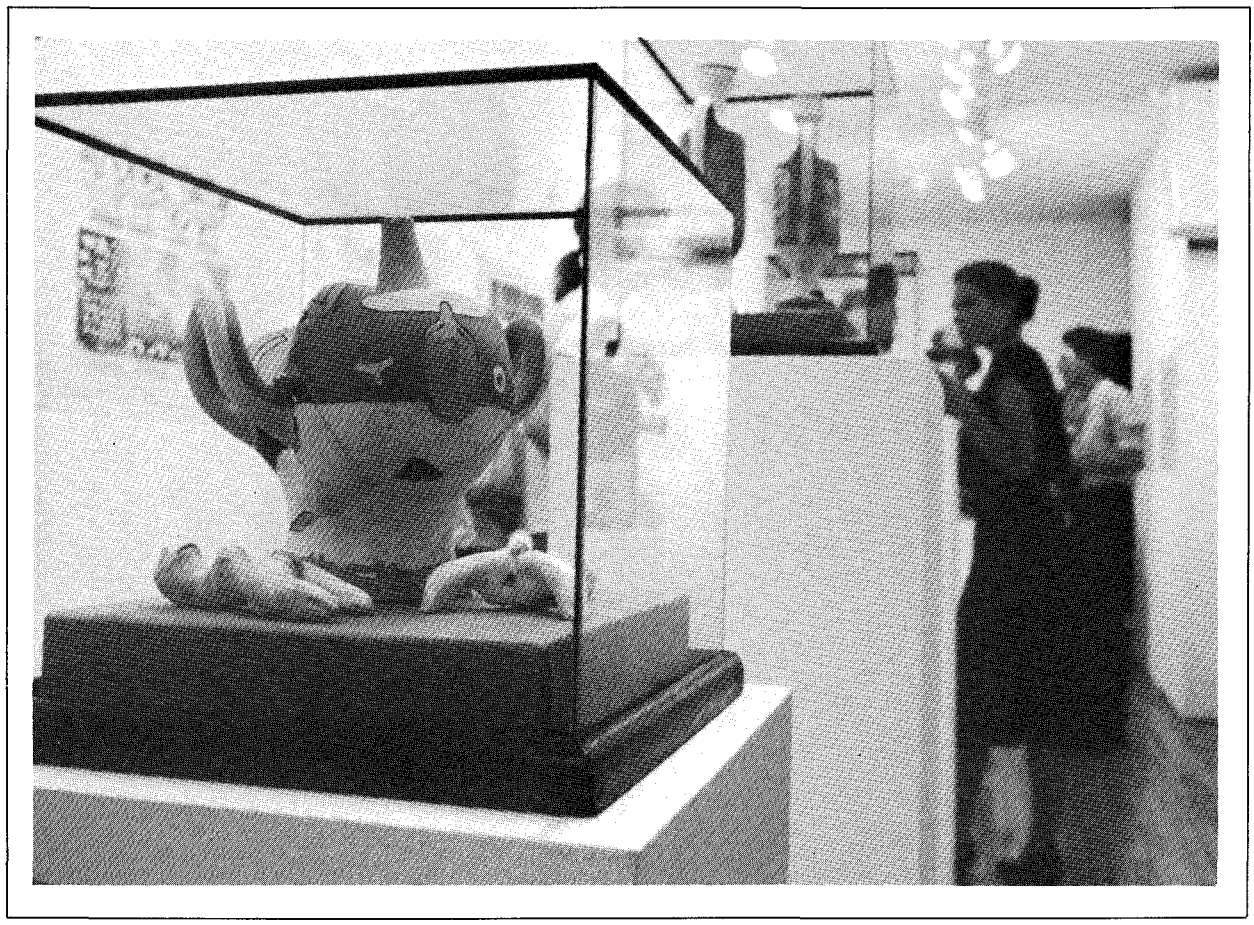

Beauvais Lyons. Installation of artifacts and lithographs at Center Gallery, Madison, Wisconsin. 1980.

"Artifacts contain a wealth of historical and cultural information, whether they are portrait paintings, postage stamps or plumbing parts. Artifactual fiction is the allusion to any conceivable culture through the fabrication of artifacts which reflect the values of such a culture. While there are practically no limitations to imaginary cultural artifacts, when they are documented in the factual context of a conventional museology, they become tangible and real."

Beauvais Lyons

According to Beauvais Lyons, the power of Donald Evans' work is in "the thoroughness of his fiction." The artist Lyons is alive (Donald Evans was in his teens when Lyons was issued): a potter and lithographer, he does not make postage stamps, but he does see a vital connection between his work and Evans' stamps.

Lyons is the youngest (and, one thinks, perhaps the best) of a "group" of American artists who practice what might best be called the art of *mock-documentation*. Other names which come to mind include Clayton Bailey (Curator of Kaolithic Curiosities at the Wonders of the World Museum in Port Costa, California), David Gilhooly, Rodger Lang (Professor of Pieleontology), Dr. Jens Art Morrison (Farmisist and Gehographer, founder and director of the Farmounian Foundation), Doug Baldwin, and Norman Daly.

Most of the these people are potters. Excepting Gilhooly and Daly, they have studied or taught in either Wisconsin or Iowa (all have now departed). The humor of most is blatant (in some cases, well-nigh crude), as, for example, in the work of Lang, who "unearths" the artifacts of a Southwestern culture which apothesized pieces of pie. He is (of course) a professor of *pieleontology*, who researches *pieleoliths*.

Baldwin digs up human-ducks, the insight for which came to him during experimentation with molds for garden figurines (he discovered that a duck head mold fit perfectly on the neck of a *Blue Boy* body). Gilhooly's works are fake remains of distinguished ancient frogs: he

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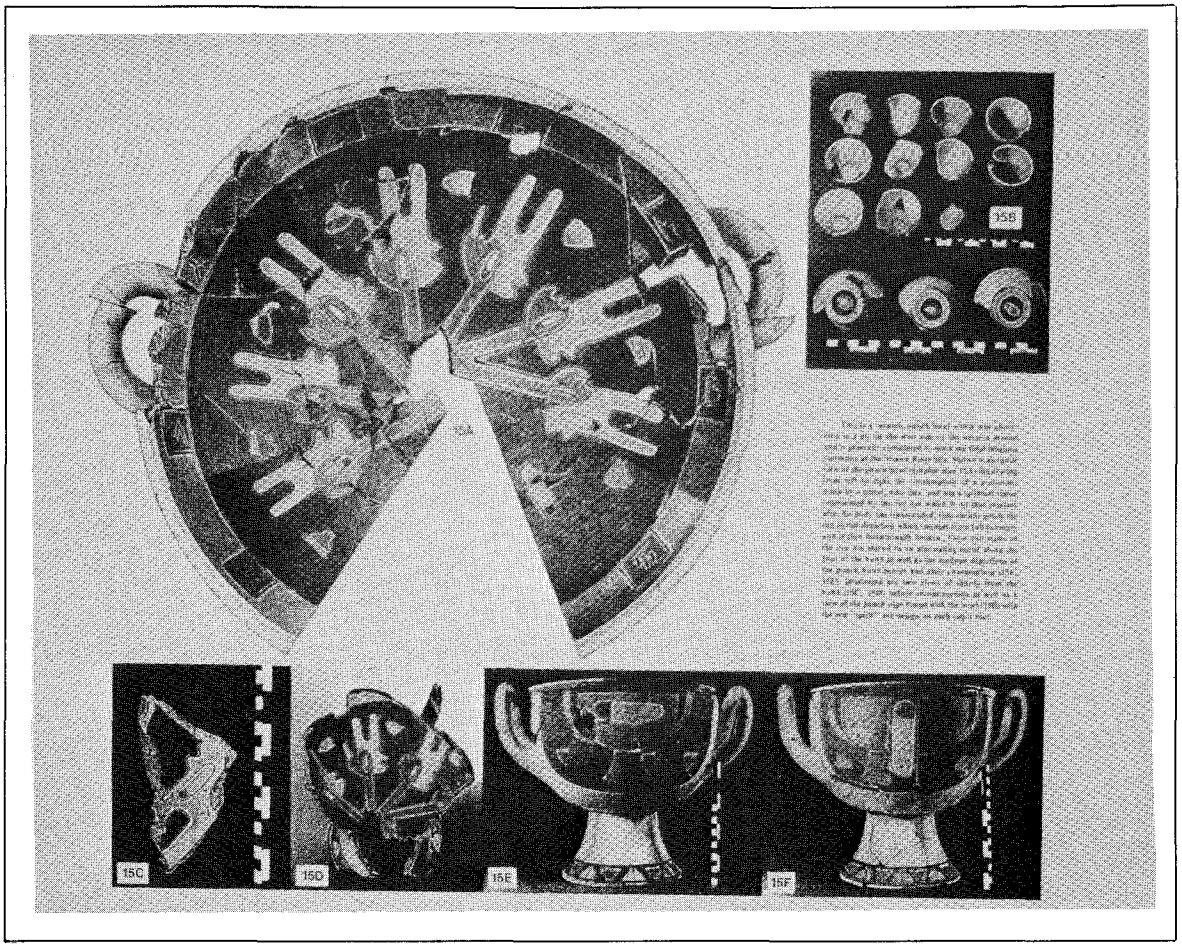

Beauvais Lyons. The Arenot Noawa River Ceremonial Complex, Plate 15. *1980. Lithograph, 22 × 30". Courtesy the artist.*

builds whiteware statues of *Boris Frogloff, Mao Tse Toad, Frog Washington Carver,* and so on.

The most malodorous of the lot are undoubtedly Clayton Bailey (who poses as Dr. Gladstone) and the interminable Dr. Jens Art Morrison. Bailey has assembled a museum of "kaolithic" wonders, including the bones of Bigfoot (with a *Big*foot dropping by its side). Morrison is a "farmisist and gehographer," who claims to have exhumed intact the wonderfully delicate relics (inscribed with their *pigtaglyphs*) of a "small, religious sect of peaceful quadrupeds," who trekked across the *Boaring Straits.*

In his bizarre guidebook, entitled *A History of Farmounia* (Farmounian Foundation, 1980), Dr. Morrison documents the immigration of the Farmounian culture from the forests of Western Europe to the *Iowaonia Basin* (no doubt near Coe College, where the good doctor formerly taught). There they lived in *pigloos* (resembling rolls of fresh-cut hay) and constructed the *Great Farmounian Wall* (not to be confused with concrete bridge abutments), remains of which can still be seen along Interstate 80.

A less discreet detail includes his account of the factional *Hamroids,* whose name takes on new meaning when one is told that (circa 436 A.D.) all Farmounian creatures (having ingested *pigote*) simultaneously levitated into outer space—and settled on Uranus.

Lyons' work is deadpan (he is in his twenties, all the rest are middle-aged). Indeed, it is so subtle that, short of operose viewing, it is not readily seen as art, nor is it evident humor. He calls himself a "mock-archaeologist," and his work can be mistaken for veritable archaeological facts: reassembled antique pots, detailed excavation maps, and arcane annotations in archaeological jargon.

Lyons' first archaeological work, entitled *The Arenot Noawa River Ceremonial Complex,* was completed in 1980 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (he is now at Arizona State University), and installed only once, at Madison's Center Gallery. The total "hoax" consists of about twelve clay vessels (cracked and reconstructed) and an exquisite series of fifteen lithographic plates. Through lengthy text, maps and charts, notes on "reliable" sources (e.g., reference to the fictional archaeologist Heinrich *Dreckmueller),* and skillfully altered photographs, one is exhaustively introduced to the beliefs and ceremonial practices of the Arenot culture.

Every aspect is exact. Each clay bowl or bottle has been hand-constructed (by Lyons), then floridly inscribed with a pattern of credible icons. Arenot sexual rites are shown, rituals of birth and death, of puberty and sacrifice. (Lyons has even "lost" some shards, to further enhance the illusion.) When installed for viewing, the plates are mounted on the wall, the pots within glass

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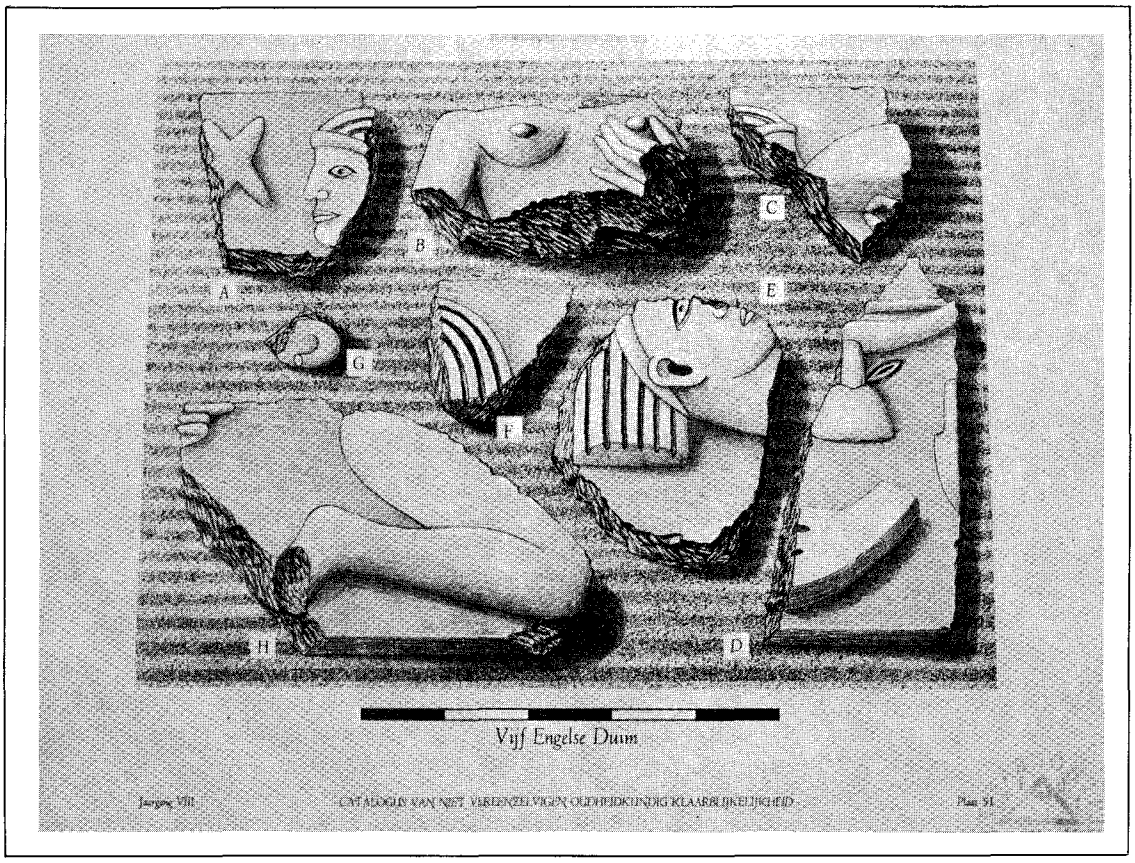

cases, so that the full impression is that of an archaeological show.

His second work (in progress) involves the reconstruction of a fictional "ancient clay book" in which one finds depicted the creation myth of an unidentified culture which once inhabited the Karakoran Pass in Tibet. Missing portions of the artifacts have been documented in a spurious archaeological text, *Catalogus Van Niet Vereenzelvigen Oudheidkundig Klaarblijkelijkheid* (the Dutch Catalogue of Unidentified Archaeological Evidence, Bombay 1912.). However, this book itself is missing, with the exception of six random pages from Volume VIII. (On the back of each of these pages are "authenticating" stamps, verifying that they were printed in 1912 by H. Van Sijthoff Lithografie, with offices in Rotterdam and Bombay, as well as a plausible library seal.)

When this work is finished, the clay fragments and the lithographic suite will be supplemented by a fifteen plate catalogue (presumably somewhat like that of the Arenot work), documenting the history and significance of the clay book, a scale model of a Karakoran architectural site, and a large replica (to be installed at the entrance of the exhibition) of a colossal head relief. The total exhibition will be comprised of all these parts.

Marianne Moore once said that poetry should present us an imaginary garden containing a real toad. Lyons does the inverse. He fabricates the toads, but implants them in gardens of normally credible jargon. Someone should exhume him. He is, as Donald Evans was, *thorough* in his fiction.

Beauvais Lyons. (Above) plate from Catalogus Van Niet Vereenzelvigen Oudheidkundig Klaarblijkelijkheid. *1981. Lithograph, 14 ½ × 17 ½". Courtesy the artist. (Below) authenticating stamp printed on reverse of plate.*

"The fiction of Jorge Luis Borges has influenced my work considerably. In his story 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,' the author uncovers an elaborate work of academic fiction by a secret society of scholars who fabricated the eleventh volume of an obscure tome entitled The Encyclopedia of Tlon. *It is through this 'factual' portrayal of a hypothetical science, art and philosophy that I have acquired a paradigm for my work in the genre of Mock-Archaeology."*

Beauvais Lyons

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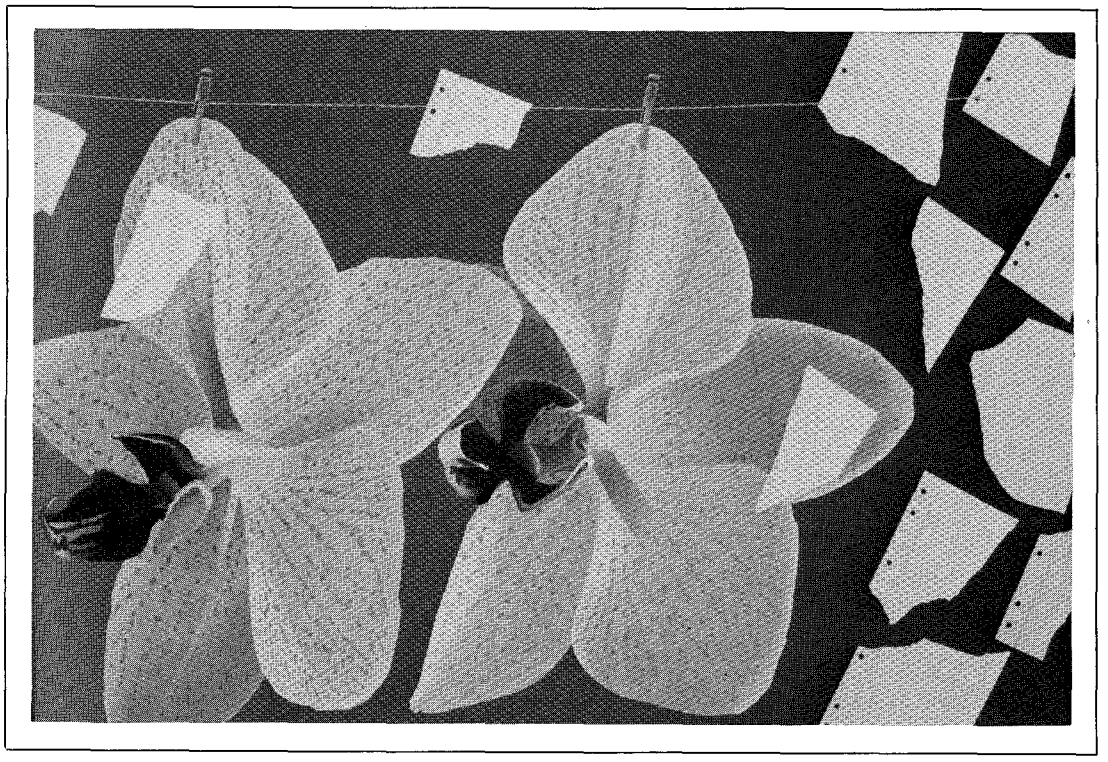
TESS GALLAGHER

BENEFICIARIES



She went to get the parking permit. Then she started up the stairs to the "Personnel" office. On the landing she stopped to look down. It was one of those winding staircases that allowed a panoramic view of the large marble entrance area. There was glass above the door.

They had just moved to this city and had recently accepted employment with the same company. They had been glad to move. They hoped to make a place for themselves so they would not have to move again. The day before this day, she had filled out forms, signed things, had the I.D. picture taken. Now it was Stanley's turn.

As she approached the receptionist she heard, from behind the partition, a voice say "beneficiary."

"My children. I want to name my children," she heard Stanley say.

"Do you want the amount shared equally?"

"Equally. Yes, equally," Stanley said.

Her strength seemed to slip downward in her body. Louise waited; then she turned and moved toward the staircase. Doors opened and closed in other parts of the building. There was a white gloom of light falling from the arch of glass panes above the entrance way, illuminating the marble pattern of the floor. She went slowly down the steps. When she reached the lobby she stood in the core of light and waited for Stanley. In the panes above the doorway she saw it had begun to snow again. The sky seemed to be hurling itself in steady bits of matter at the glass.

When he reached her he took her arm and guided her outside. The wet flakes collided with her forehead and cheeks, her open eyes. They hurried toward the car. Louise got inside while Stanley used his arm to brush snow from the windshield. Snowflakes continued to fall into the space he cleared, then cleared again. He got in, started the engine and turned on the wipers. The wipers spanked the windshield viciously. Louise was reminded of a symphony conductor she'd seen, maniacally circumscribing his little triangle of influence with a baton. When they were into traffic Louise thought she could bring up what had happened.

"I'm sorry I heard it," she said, "but I did. I heard you name your children as your beneficiaries."

Stanley took his eyes off the road for a minute and looked at her. "Does that surprise you? Wouldn't you think of your children? If you had children?"

"I don't have children," Louise said, "so I can't think of them. I feel foolish even talking this way, but it made me lonely to name you as my beneficiary yesterday, then today to hear you hadn't even thought of me," she said. Then she said, "Something changed back there."

"Because I have children and you don't?" he said.

"They're in their twenties, your children. They're

TESS GALLAGHER teaches at Syracuse University. Recent books of her poetry are Instructions to the Double *and* Under Stars, *both from Graywolf Press.*

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adults," she said. "They can take care of themselves."

"They're still my children," he said. "And I'm surprised at you. That you'd want to deny them. I'm surprised at you."

They were nearing the mall. Stanley turned his head from side to side as he watched for cars. Then he negotiated the turn into the lot. There were tall gray mounds of snow beside the telephone poles in the lot. He got as close to the entrance of the store complex as he could and parked the car. They did not get out. He seemed to be considering what more to say. They had come because they needed to buy curtains for the house. Louise did not think Stanley had understood what had happened to her. He was trying to talk it away now.

"It isn't the money," she said at last. "It's the thought that if you were to die you hadn't thought of me first. What if you died and I became ill?" she said.

"But I *do* think of you. Before anyone," he said. "You're always first." He was trying to keep his voice steady, but Louise could hear his exasperation breaking through.

"Not this time. You were first with me, but I wasn't first for you," she said. "That's all I know and I'm sorry to know it."

Their breaths had fogged the windows. The snow falling to the windshield seemed strange and furry.

"If you had children I know you would have done the same thing," he said. "You wouldn't judge like this if you had children."

"I'm not judging," she said. "I just feel sad. I can't get out of feeling sad. It isn't your fault. It just hit me, standing there like I wasn't there. But I was, and then to hear myself so forgotten. . . . Maybe I should have named someone else too."

It was cold in the car and so much snow had fallen on the windshield that she couldn't tell if it was still falling.

"Maybe you should have. Maybe you should," Stanley said, his voice going up a notch. "I didn't do this to hurt you. You know you're the most important person in my life.

"Here, here," he said. He put his arms awkwardly around her shoulders and drew her face to his chest where some snow had melted. She could smell the damp wool of his coat.

"Let's go in," he said, rubbing her back. "Let's get our curtains and go home and get our house set up." When he opened the door a fringe of snow dropped onto his knees. He got out and stood brushing it off while Louise scooted across the seat and stepped out on his side.

Inside the mall people still had on their coats. It was a curious inside-outside feeling she was having and it made her want to sit down, but all the benches were taken. It was like a huge, luxurious train station but the trains were all on their way to other cities, so everyone was having to amuse themselves by spending money and waiting for the trains to come back.

Stanley guided her toward the escalator. They rode up on different steps. He looked back at her. Then he reached and took her hand from her pocket. They rose without moving between the blue tiled walls, leaving an entire first-story world behind. The steps scooped them onto the floor where household goods seemed parts of a gigantic house that had accumulated, then gotten out of order and now appealed to the customers to take some of it home and solve the duplication. There were baby beds, clothes hampers, lamps of every kind, mattresses, coffee tables and window dressings. They passed a counter heaped with pillows. Stanley stopped and began to pinch them and to read their labels aloud.

"We need some good pillows," he said. "Let's get goosedown pillows. Okay? Let's do it." He picked up a pillow by its middle and put his head on it, trying it out as he stood in the aisle. "Hey, feel this," he said, handing the pillow to Louise. It had a plastic covering on it which was cold to her cheek. But she couldn't get the feel of it as a pillow because she was standing. She wanted to lie down with it and not have to go any farther. Stanley had walked to the far side of the display. She put the pillow on the floor and lay down in her coat with her purse beside her. As if from far away, she could hear the hum of shoppers.

"This one says Goosedown, but it's the name of the company. That beats all. The pillow is 100% Polyester," Stanley said from somewhere above and away. "You have to watch them every minute," he said.

But Louise had closed her eyes. She lay very still and listened to the sound of feet, multitudes of feet passing, an overlay of sounds coming to her in little scufflings and shocks to the floor. She did not worry about anyone finding her or seeing her. She unbuttoned her coat and pulled her knees up. She lay under the white, fluorescent light and thought of the snow falling over the building, and she thought of the trains moving deeper and deeper into the snowy countryside.

They laughed about it later that night. How she had lain right down in the middle of the department store with her pillow and how she had taken a long while to answer him when he had stood over her trying to wake her up.

"But I wasn't asleep," she said.

The house was beginning to get settled, but with both of them working it was hard to keep it as neat as they liked. Stanley suggested they hire a woman to come in once a week and clean. Louise had at first been too shy with the woman to tell her what she really needed done, but she'd solved this by leaving lists on the kitchen counter. Louise had asked her to be sure to dust in the bedroom and this was how the mail she kept near her jewelry box had been moved onto the nightstand where Stanley had found it.

She was adding to a grocery list from the recipe for chicken casserole when Stanley came into the kitchen with the letter from "Personnel." He handed it to her out of its envelope so she would know he had seen it.

"Did you do this out of spite?" he said.

She took it from him and put it back into its envelope without looking at it.

"No," she said. "I just felt more—more equal this way."

"That's very calculated, to go back like that and change what you'd decided before," he said. "Who did you name instead of me? An ex-husband?"

"I have some nieces," she said. "I went back to *my*

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family. I don't have children, but I've got my brother's children. They've got a long way to go in this world."

"I wish I hadn't looked at that letter," he said. "I wish I hadn't found out you'd done this. It feels like you're trying to get even or something, because of my children."

Louise looked down at the photograph of the casserole with all the portions waiting to be divided onto the white plates stacked beside it.

"It's *my* death and *my* business," she said and shut the book. "You want me to remember you, to think about you, but you don't do the same for me. It makes me feel ugly to talk like this. I've just tried to make things fair again, that's all."

Stanley was leaning against the counter near the door to the basement. He took the lid off an empty mayonnaise jar on the counter and began using it for an ashtray.

"I have to tell you," he said, "it was not your proudest moment that day you criticized me for naming my own children as beneficiaries. I wouldn't ever tell that to anyone if I were you. I think you'd come off looking pretty bad."

Louise took a dishrag and began to collect the crumbs off the top of the toaster into her palm. Then she washed her hands under the tap and dried them on her apron. She took a scrub-brush and began to scrub the food from the plates into the disposal. The dishes rattled and clashed against each other.

She turned to him. "If you want people to know, *you* tell them," she said. "Don't you be telling me what my proudest moment is. You can't decide that. God alone knows that." Even though she had just mentioned God she felt godless and heartless, as though nothing could soften her again or hold them back from the harm they seemed intent on. What was happening to them was crazy. She didn't know how to be reasonable. They were talking about their deaths, yet they were alive and each of them sure they were not going to be the one who died first.

What you imagined affected you; Louise could see that now. It did not stay in the mind. It got into your heart and into your words and changed the things you had hoped would give comfort. It stripped you bare, this imagining. It laid you in your grave and counted out your belongings and told you who would weep, who would go through your closets, your drawers.

"What can we do?" Stanley asked.

But it seemed to her he already knew there was nothing to be done. He didn't say anything for a minute. He drew on his cigarette.

"I don't know what we can do," she said. "I feel like I've passed right out of the world. Like we're out there on the other side looking back."

"Louise," he said. "Let's stop this." He ground his cigarette out in the mayonnaise lid.

She turned back to the sink. But she could feel him behind her, and then she felt the pressure of his hands at her waist. She held her palms steady under the flow from the tap. She felt the flesh on her arms ripple. He leaned against her so she felt her pelvic bones push against the counter. His lips touched the nape of her neck. He pushed harder. The warm water was running. □

STEPHANIE HALLGREN

A WIFE ON THE ROOF

His wife's on the roof. It's her place
After dinner dishes and money talk.
She slips back after he's asleep, washes her face.

If he wakes alone against the wall,
His wife's on the roof. It's her place, not his,
Among the geraniums and antenna stalks.

Drunk, he met her once on the stairs
And let her pass, some woman.
His wife's on the roof.

Sometimes in the half-light of five o'clock
He'll touch her breast. She wakes,
Rises, runs water in the coffee pot.

He eats, lifts his lunch. His legs ache
Even before the factory whistle hawks.
He hurries to the bus, turns,

And from the roof, his wife hovers
Above the specks of men,
Dives into space, and holds it close.

WHALES

The white whale wants to live again,
like us, he might
come among people, rising, his head
nothing but the beginning
of a calm profile,
unable to start direction, unable
to toss his long white spray,
a single atmosphere,
air, air.
If the whale would, we would—
great grey girls, foam blooming
from our mouths gaping and the foam
riding toward shore.
We could go over to whales on a day like this.
More than that, we might say,
I woke. Suddenly I couldn't walk.
Then all men, whales like us,
could flip upward
into the airway above the body.

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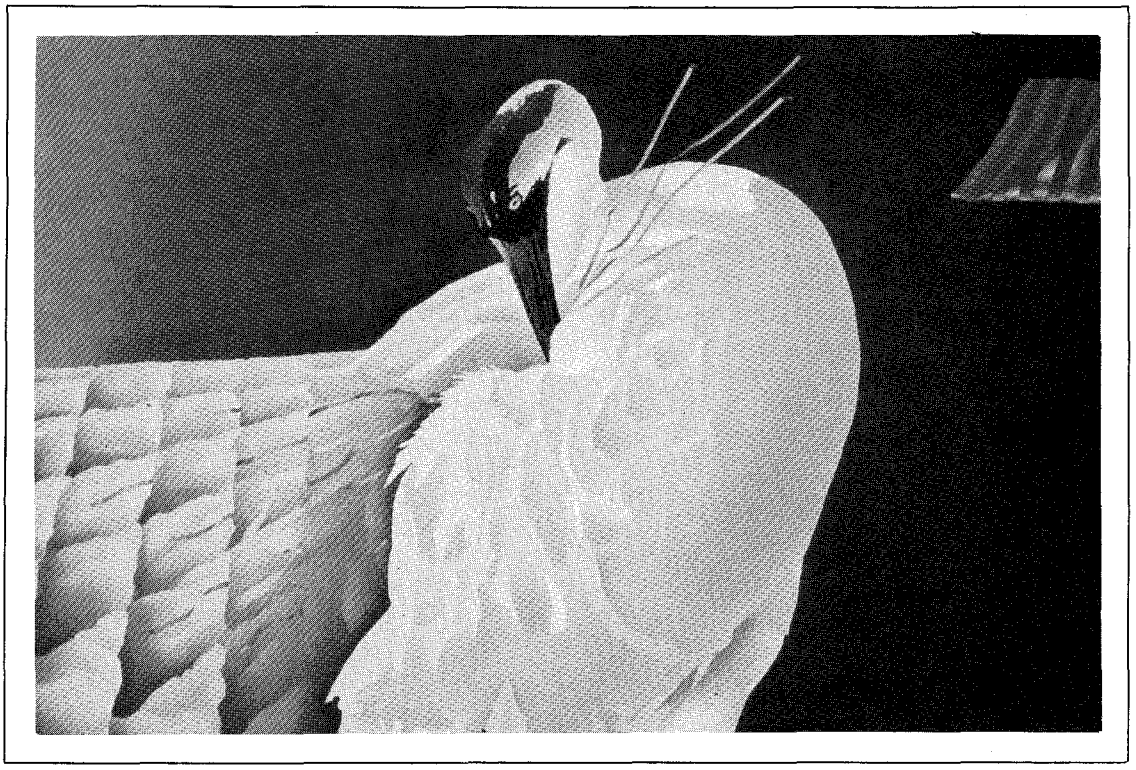
BARBARA PURCHASE

MARE SERENITATIS



The summer after he died, she stayed with Gram for nearly two months. Her father took her to the bus station on his way to work. He drove slowly, leaning forward in his seat, his eyes impassive. Raindrops shattered themselves against the windshield.

"You'll be in Aiken around five, so Gram's expecting you for dinner," he said.

She nodded.

"It would be a good idea not to talk about Grampa. And don't go messing around in his study either. She's kept all of his things. It's all the same as ever."

He shook his head and sighed, and then fell silent. Anne let the swish of the wipers lull her. She silently willed the pale arms of the headlamps to stop pointing at the pavement and to direct the car to the adjacent fields, where the long grasses would swallow it.

At the station, they waited in the car until they saw a light emerging from the highway mists.

"Here's your bus," he said.

He kissed her on the forehead and handed her a ten dollar bill. "Something for a rainy day." He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Another rainy day."

There were only five other passengers on board, and she had the entire back seat to herself. She wiped the window with her sleeve. Her father hadn't driven away yet, and she could just make out the grey profile of his head, not watching her, but bent downward, as if studying his hands on the steering wheel. As the bus was edging on to the highway, he looked up quickly and waved.

She met no one on the walk from just outside the farm town of Aiken to Gram's. It had rained here earlier too, but now spoked wheels of sunlight beamed from the breaking cloud above her. She soon left the highway for a lane lined with elms. Birds shrieked above the whine of heat bugs, and gusts of wind blew water from the leaves onto her hair.

Gram's bungalow was set about a quarter mile back from the lane. Grampa had built the house himself, before Anne had been born. He'd been a practical man; yet a suppressed whimsy must have lurked within him, because the simple retirement home he'd talked of all his working life became instead an eccentric gingerbread cottage—all curlicues, fluted trim and dainty stone paths edged with musk mallows and leading nowhere. It embarrassed her father, who blamed a sudden senility. Anne thought it was wonderful.

Gram was waiting on the porch hammock. Anne dropped her suitcase at the foot of the steps and ran to her.

BARBARA PURCHASE is a native of Windsor, Ontario, and a free-lance editor in Toronto. This is her first published story.

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They hugged—Anne fiercely, the old woman tenderly, patting the girl's thin back and whispering, "Bless your heart. Bless your heart," in her light German accent.

Gram had put flannel sheets on the bed even though it was June. The pillows, larger and softer than those at home, enfolded Anne's head. She listened to how the ticking of the clock in the living room sometimes fell into time with Gram's snores from across the hall, and played a game of remembering the muted shapes of the dark room. A bulge on the closet shelf had her stumped until she decided it must be the wig Gram had bought last fall at the Aiken Five & Dime, just before Grampa had died. To her father's considerable relief, Gram had promised never to be seen outdoors in it.

"I only wear it when I'm not feeling good with myself," she'd said dolefully, after he'd found it perched like an exotic bird on the coat rack and had asked if she were planning to go out on Hallowe'en. "Besides," she'd added, "your dad picked it out." Anne hadn't believed this—Grampa hated shopping and Anne couldn't imagine him entering a wig shop—but it closed the subject: Grampa was sick and entitled to his aberrations.

The scent of lilacs now drifted in through the open window. Gram had never hung curtains in either of the bedrooms, despite Anne's pleading. "Peeping Toms? Don't be crazy," she'd snorted. "Windows are to see out of. Anyway, don't worry yourself. If a man should go to the trouble of climbing the trellis to see your bare bottom, well we will just let him."

Anne had no idea why Gram would consider the sight of her bottom fit punishment for a prowler, but then Gram's ways of dealing with the world were unfathomable. She was like a gypsy. She cooked with strange-smelling herbs and could tell people about the future by feeling the bumps on their skulls, and no one should expect to understand her altogether.

A moist warmth on her forehead pulled her awake. She opened her eyes. Gram's face was just inches above her. Plump, lined as an apple doll, the eyes piquant and green, it was startling so close. She kissed Anne's cheek. "It's eight o'clock."

Anne sat up and leaned forward to look out the window at the day. By the duck pond, swells of fog crouched near the ground. She watched them billow and circle, aware of a thread still bridging her to sleep, and she felt that she must recall what she had been dreaming; that the memory was important and would fade with the mists.

"Your breakfast is almost ready." Gram was at the door.

"I had a dream. It was strange." Anne didn't want her to leave yet.

Gram quickly came back and sat down on the bed. She loved dreams. They were her specialty. She'd trade all the best tarot cards and lumpy heads in the world for one good, symbolic dream.

"What?"

"I was . . . there was a baby . . ."

"Yes?"

"I . . . I forget."

"Try to remember." Gram shut her eyes and massaged Anne's temples.

"No." Anne removed the hands from her head. "It's gone. I'm sorry."

Gram clapped her hands together and stood up. "Well, if it is, then it is. Maybe it will come back after you have eaten. Was it bad?"

"Yes. I think it was."

"So." She wagged a finger at Anne. "You must tell me and get it out of your system or it will become a poison and give you gas. Get dressed now. Your eggs are cooking."

Anne began fumbling with her pajama buttons. She'd suddenly remembered that the dream had been about Grampa. He was a baby in her arms. At first the face was young and unfamiliar, but it changed into a puckered beige, and she knew it was really a tiny Grampa she held, because he was whimpering about not getting enough potatoes to eat in the hospital. Luckily she'd not said anything. Gram wouldn't have wanted to be reminded of the potatoes.

Grampa had been in the hospital a month before he had died. Gram visited him every day, only returning home to sleep, and when she wasn't cornering nurses to instruct them on her herbal cures, she read his fortune, covering the blanket with her bright, dog-eared cards. Anne could tell from the nurses' careful way of talking to Gram that they thought the old woman was crazy.

The doctors had put Grampa on a starchless diet, and one day an intern caught Gram shovelling cold mashed potatoes from a paper bag down Grampa's throat. "If people smuggle in anything, it's liquor," the intern shook his head in bewilderment when telling Anne's father about it later. "I've never heard of potatoes." He said she made a great fuss about handing over her bag. Anne knew Gram had tremendous faith in the power of potatoes; last summer Gram had read an article by an ex-priest who claimed large doses of potatoes cured cancer, weak hearts and thinning hair, and she'd said it made a lot of sense because she didn't know one bald Irishman.

"He can't live without them," she complained bitterly to Anne's father.

"Why in God's name can't he live without potatoes?" he asked, exasperation making him harsh. "Do the bumps in his head feel like french fries?"

Gram looked hurt and didn't reply, but she confided in Anne that any fool knew Grampa's head was too smooth for a proper reading. "It was the cards told me," she whispered. Anne watched Grampa sleep. He lay on his side, his knees curled up and his hands between his thighs. She wondered if the cards had told Gram that this would happen to him; that he'd drool and babble and become so thin his skin would be like taut grey rubber stretched over his bones.

She stood in the kitchen doorway, her eyes fixed on the table. Gram was already seated, buttering toast and whistling in the curious way she had of blowing air almost soundlessly through her lips and humming in the back of her throat.

"Sit down for goodness' sake, Annie," she said without looking up. "The food is not going to come to you."

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As self-consciously as if she'd been asked to walk across the room naked, Anne went over to the table and took her place near the window, the place that had always been hers. She sat rigidly, not knowing if she had chosen properly.

"You've seen a ghost maybe?" Gram asked after a few moments.

"It's the three settings," Anne murmured. "There's only two of us."

"Two. Three. What does it matter?"

"It's just . . . well, it doesn't, I guess."

"No, it doesn't matter." Gram carefully picked up crumbs of toast from the table cloth. "This is my house and no one is to stare at me as if I was a crazy person." Her voice shook.

Anne reached for Gram's hands. She felt like crying because the fingers were so crazily twisted with arthritis; because she had let her suspicion show. "All right," she said. "It's all right." And it was, if Gram was making believe and knew it. It was why she kept the door to his study closed—if some things didn't change, then Grampa wasn't utterly gone. But Anne wouldn't tell her father about this. She had many secrets and this would be another. She could hide things inside herself, keeping them frozen and intact, like an ant in ice.

The three place settings turned up erratically; sometimes the table was only laid for two. Except for this and, of course, for Grampa's absence, the first weeks of the summer were almost like previous ones. Gram and Anne still walked into town for groceries on Mondays; they still spent the afternoons in the yard, Gram crocheting or gardening, bent over her vegetables like a pecking bird, and Anne feeding the ducks, or filling her arms with the blood roots and trout lilies that arced around the south and east sides of the farm. After dinner they would walk to the edge of the trees and listen to the poignant calls of the whippoorwills. Then they'd sit on the porch steps, leaning back to look up at the spattered sky while Gram pointed out the Dippers and Orion's Belt, and told Anne about the moon's seas: Mare Humorum, Mare Tranquillitatis, Mare Serenitatis. Long after Anne had gone to bed, Gram would sit at the kitchen table with her tarots. Anne would fall asleep hearing the slap of the cards and Gram's low incessant muttering.

July fifteenth. Grampa's birthday, Anne thought as she dressed. She gazed out the window, watching the ducks move like phantoms in and out of the grey mist. They seemed graceful and deliberate, as lovely as swans. The house was oddly quiet—no noises could be heard from the kitchen, and she was baffled. Gram was always up and cooking breakfast by the time Anne rose.

She looked in Gram's bedroom, saw that the bed was empty and unmade, and then wandered down the hall to the bathroom. The door was closed.

"Gram?"

Nothing.

She turned the knob and poked her head inside. "You in here?"

Gram's voice came from the bathtub. "Come in if you are coming in. And close the door. All the hot air is leaving."

Anne stepped inside, averting her eyes. "Should I make the breakfast? "

"Come by me here and look at this. Here." Gram was pointing at a jagged white scar on her stomach.

Her first thought was that this wasn't Gram. The head in the pink shower cap wasn't hers. The rim of the cap pushed the brow down and forward so that the face was like a frowning monkey's. And the body—it was too secretive, too demanding. How could these liquid breasts, these wrinkled thighs be hers? How could such a maze of lines and colored patches have been hidden under her dresses? Anne held her breath because she was becoming tight with hysteria.

"Here is the place where my appendix came out," Gram was explaining gravely. "And here," she pointed to a line under her left nipple, "a lump was taken out of me." She stared at her breast wonderingly. "Just sliced away like when you take an eye off a potato."

"I'll wash your back," Anne said, moving to the end of the tub, where she felt safer.

"My back?" Gram asked distractedly. "Wash my back?"

"Yes, Gram. Give me the soap."

Obediently, Gram fished for the bar and handed it over her head. Anne began to lather the freckled skin, painting sudsy loops within loops along the shoulders.

"Well, that is nice," Gram sighed. She closed her eyes and started whistling softly. "Your Grampa sometimes washed my back too," she said quietly.

Anne continued her circles, thinking how pretty Gram's back was. It was small, subdued somehow. And suddenly, in one sharp jab of understanding, she believed she knew how much Gram missed Grampa. Because he had washed her back. He had seen these frail shoulders, this innocent, unmarked skin, so different from the rest of her body. But it was more than that. It was because Gram had *let* him see her back, had let him know and judge a part of her whose worth she herself could never be certain of.

"I am not on this earth forever. Don't think I am," Gram said, half turning in the tub and eyeing Anne with suspicion. Startled, Anne dropped the soap.

"No, I don't," Anne said, although she'd never thought about how long Gram might be on the earth.

"I will be gone in a while." Gram smiled and shut her eyes. "Soon. I am not a healthy person. Years ago I should have died, Annie. Years and years ago."

Gram's former meal regime collapsed after its initial setback. Lunches were missed, suppers didn't appear on the table until midnight, and once Gram shuffled into Anne's bedroom at four a.m. carrying a precariously overloaded breakfast tray. Anne wouldn't have minded a change in routine, but she found its complete breakdown disturbing. "It's because she's dying," Anne thought. "She doesn't care because one day she'll be dead." She wanted to shock herself with these words, to make herself suffer by them now and thus lessen her suffering later. She foresaw her pain as sharp and white, and it terrified

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her. The force of her fear became so overwhelming, she was convinced that it must be more powerful than any force demanding death.

She resolved to keep Gram alive. There would be no more operations. No more scars, like white worms petrified in the skin, would mark the empty places beneath. And surely she would be helped—the mortal rules that applied unsparingly to everyone else would bend for Gram.

She began preparing the meals, mostly hotdogs and sandwiches, and Gram was content to relinquish the housework. Either she didn't care or didn't notice when dust started to trace the limbs of the furniture or when lunch was a plate of potato chips and a mug of tea. In fact, nothing seemed to interest her except for her tarots and, more fervently, her crocheting. Anne would sit across from her in the living room, fascinated by the knotted fingers working the hook, by the nodding head and the tuneless whistling. Gram wore her wig all the time now, and as she nodded it would slowly fall in front of her eyes. She'd absently push it back, never getting it in place, so that it sat cocked to one side, saucy and yellow and not quite holding in place the wisps of grey hair clinging to the forehead and falling down the cheeks like tear stains.

She let Anne bathe and dress her. Because Anne believed her efforts were providing Gram with the extra energy to fight off death, she was frustrated at seeing it wasted on doilies and cards. She begged the old woman to nap, to sit in the sun, and when she received a blank gaze in response, she took it to mean that Gram, too, was consumed with an unspeakable fear of her death.

By late summer the already lace-ridden house had surrendered to Gram's obsession. Every possible surface was covered. The figurines on the mantle began sprouting white dresses; the knobs of chairs, tasseled hats. A week went by without Gram saying a word to Anne, so engrossed was she in her crocheting, until one evening she spied an empty Coke bottle on a window sill.

"What's it doing there?" she demanded. "Why is it naked?"

"It's not naked," Anne said, although she knew there was nothing to be gained by arguing the point. Gram hurried over to the sill, snatched the bottle and clasped it to her chest, peering suspiciously around the room.

"There aren't any others, Gram." Anne felt exhausted. She sat on the arm of the chesterfield, looking around the room in wonder at its transformation. When had it happened? Why hadn't she seen it before? Gram returned to her chair in a movement so abrupt that Anne stood up again, as if a balance needed preserving. The clock struck eleven.

She meant to go straight to bed, but on impulse, or in defiance, or perhaps simply to be somewhere untouched by Gram's web, she found herself outside the door of Grampa's study. She turned the handle and tiptoed inside. Her father was right—nothing was changed. She circled the tip of a finger among the bits of tobacco in an ash tray.

"So. Here you are."

Anne spun around. Gram was silhouetted in the door frame.

"I thought maybe you were here." The face was in shadow, but Anne heard the smile in the voice. Vastly relieved, she moved toward the door.

"I didn't touch anything, Gram. I . . ."

"Did you see the tobacco I bought for your pipe?" The caressing voice interrupted her. "The man in the store said it was all the way from Holland."

Anne stood very still.

"I had a feeling maybe you would like it. So. When you are ready, come into the kitchen for your reading." She turned and padded down the hall.

A fly was crawling up Anne's arm. It seemed to be stomping on her skin. She tried to force her attention onto this sensation, to fill it with urgency so that she would not have to think that Gram had lost her mind, that Gram had died anyway, in spite of her. The body with its scars and its strangeness had tricked her. Gram had wanted to die.

She picked up the phone on the desk and called the operator. She forgot the number and, hearing the operator's annoyed sigh, panicked, fearing she would be disconnected. But in a moment she remembered and was put through.

Her father sounded anxious because of the late hour. She knew he was imagining an accident or illness, something more tangible than what she was about to tell him.

"Daddy?"

"What's the matter? Are you all right?"

She started to cry. Tears splashed on the mouthpiece and ran down the holes.

"Will you put her in a hospital?" She hadn't removed the chain lock yet, and he was hidden around the edge of the door.

"I don't know. Maybe. Come on, Annie, open up."

Reluctantly she let him in. "You look tired," she said.

"I drove all night." He smiled wanly. "You look tired too."

"She's asleep. You don't have to whisper. Even if she was awake, she wouldn't notice."

"I'm sorry," he said, still whispering. "You've been through a lot. But I'll take care of everything now." He hugged her and she smelled the efficient, dry-cleaned scent of his jacket. In the strength of his arms, the controlled curve of his body as he bent towards her, she sensed his feelings of release—release from a bond, or from an expectation.

"It's not that bad. She wouldn't hurt anybody," she said uncertainly. His apology made her feel like a traitor. He believed she had suffered, and she hadn't. Not enough to betray Gram. Why had she done it? Because she had been betrayed?

Gently, he pushed her away. "Don't worry. You go to bed and get some sleep. I'm taking her to your aunt Marion's for now. I'll be back for you sometime in the late afternoon."

She leaned on her bedroom windowsill, inhaling the dawn air, lush with fragrances veiled by day. The moon was still up, pale and low on the horizon. She thought of its seas and wanted to drown in one. No, not drown, float. A lone, white lily staring up at a sky devoured by Earth. □

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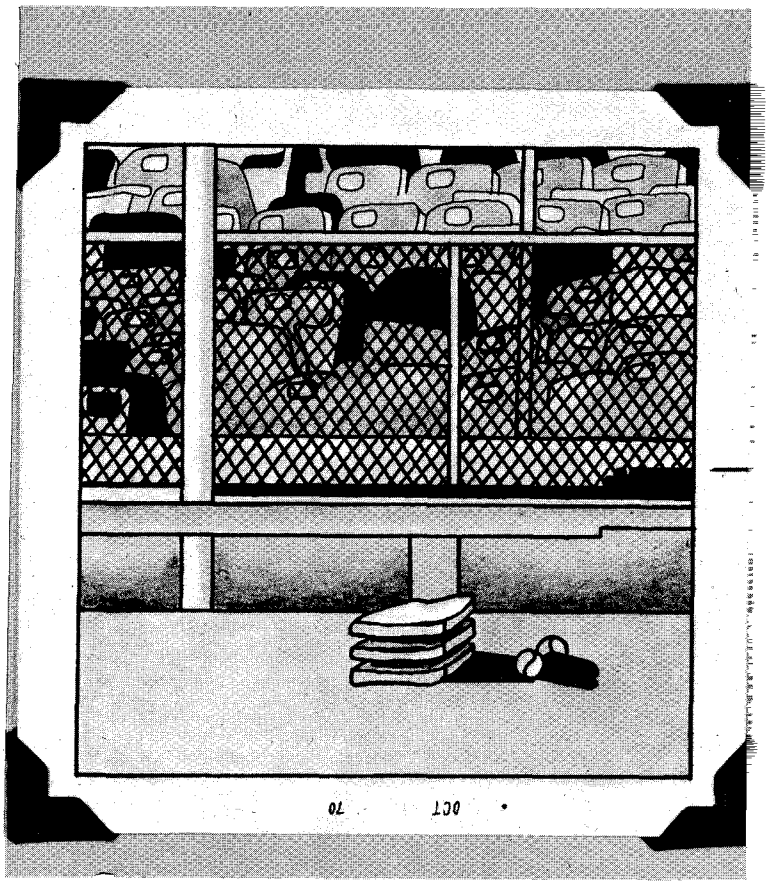
STUART DYBEK

DEATH OF THE RIGHT FIELDER



After too many balls went out and never came back we went out to check. It was a long walk—he always played deep. Finally we saw him, from the distance resembling the towel we sometimes threw down for second base.

It's hard to tell how long he'd been lying there, sprawled on his face. Had he been playing infield his presence, or lack of it, would, of course, have been noticed immediately. The infield demands communication—the constant, reassuring chatter of team play. But he was remote, clearly an outfielder (the temptation is to say out*sider*). The infield is for wise-crackers, pepper-pots, gum-poppers; the outfield is for loners, onlookers, brooders who would rather study clover and swat gnats than holler. People could pretty much be divided between infielders and outfielders. Not that one always has a choice. He didn't necessarily choose right field so much as accepted it.

There were several theories as to what killed him. From the start the most popular was that he'd been shot. Perhaps from a passing car, possibly by that gang calling themselves the Jokers who played 16 inch softball on the concrete diamond with painted bases in the center of the housing project, or by the Latin Lords who didn't play sports period. Or maybe some pervert with a telescopic sight from a bedroom window, or a mad sniper from a water tower, or a terrorist with a silencer from the expressway overpass, or maybe it was an accident, a stray slug from a robbery, or shoot-out, or assassination attempt miles away.

No matter who pulled the trigger it seemed more plausible to ascribe his death to a bullet than to natural causes like say a heart attack. Young deaths are never natural; they're all violent. Not that kids don't die of heart attacks. But he never seemed the type. Sure, he was quiet, but not the quiet of someone always listening for the heart murmur his family had repeatedly warned him about since he was old enough to play. Nor could it have been leukemia. He wasn't a talented enough athlete to die of that. He'd have been playing center, not right, if leukemia were going to get him.

The shooting theory was better, even though there wasn't a mark on him. Couldn't it have been, as some argued, a high powered bullet traveling with such velocity that its hole fuses behind it? Still, not everyone was satisfied. Other theories were formulated, rumors became legends over the years: he'd had an allergic reaction to a bee sting, been struck by a single bolt of lightning from a freak, instantaneous electrical storm, ingested too strong a dose of insecticide from the grass blades he chewed on, sonic waves, radiation, pollution, etc. And a few of us liked to think it was simply that chasing a sinking liner, diving to make a shoe-string catch, he broke his neck.

There *was* a ball in the webbing of his mitt when we turned him over. His mitt had been pinned under his body and was coated with an almost luminescent gray film. There was the same gray on his black, hightop gym

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STUART DYBEK is the author of a poetry collection, Brass Knuckles *(Pittsburgh) and fiction,* Childhood and Other Neighborhoods *(Viking).*

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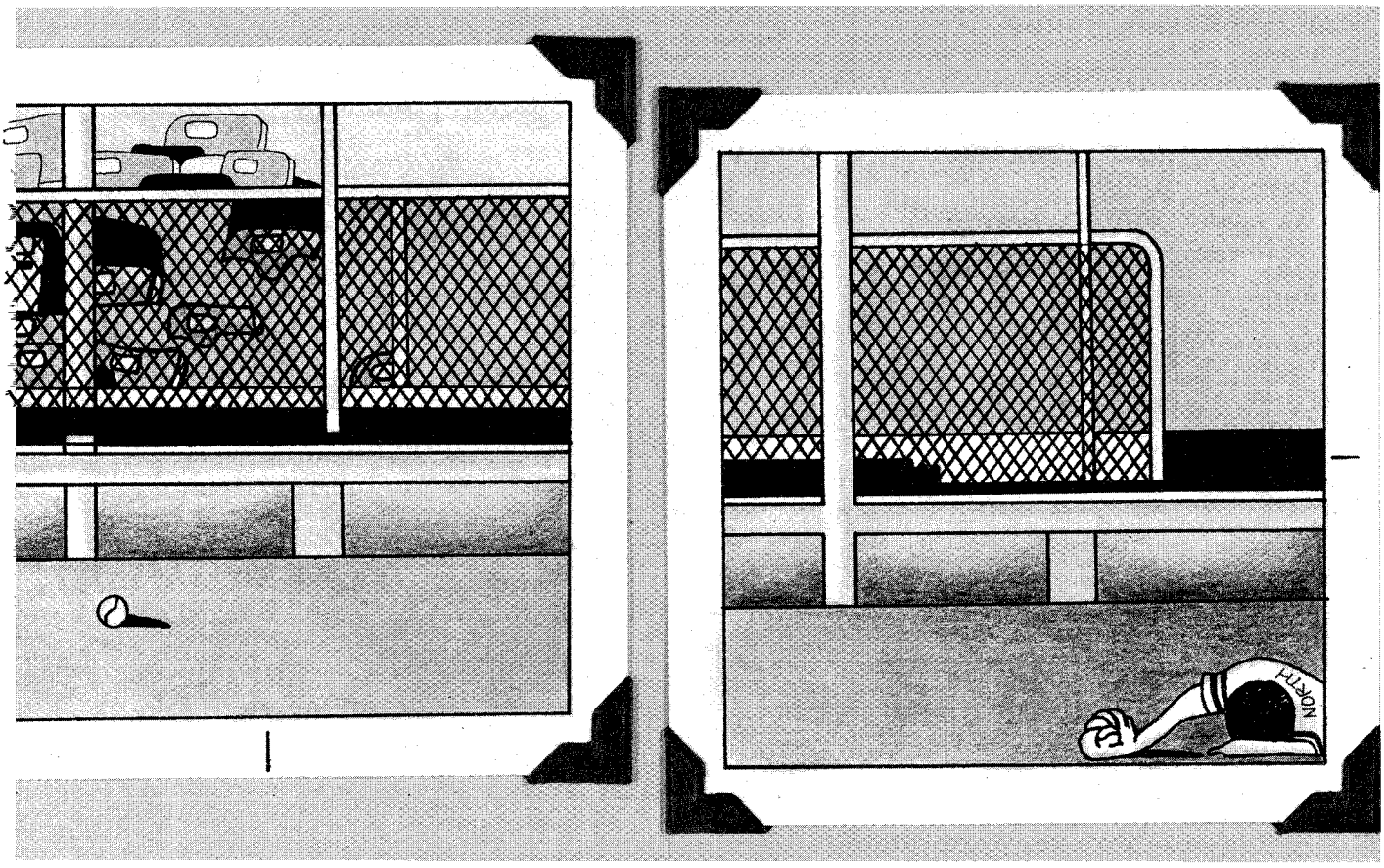

shoes, as if he'd been running through lime, and along the bill of his baseball cap—the blue felt one with the red C which he always denied stood for the Chicago Cubs. He may have been a loner, but he didn't want to be identified with a loser. He lacked the sense of humor for that, lacked the perverse pride that sticking for losers season after season breeds, and the love. He was just an ordinary guy, .250 at the plate, and we stood above him not knowing what to do next. By then the guys from the other outfield positions had trotted over. Someone, the shortstop probably, suggested team prayer. Then no one could think of a team prayer. So we all just stood there silently bowing our heads, pretending to pray while the shadows moved darkly across the outfield grass. After awhile the entire diamond was swallowed and the field lights came on.

In the bluish squint of those lights he didn't look like someone we'd once known—nothing looked quite right—and we hurriedly scratched a shallow grave, covered him over, and stamped it down as much as possible so that the next right fielder, whoever he'd be, wouldn't trip. It could be just such a juvenile, seemingly trivial stumble that would ruin a great career before it had begun, or hamper it years later the way Mantle's was hampered by bum knees. One can never be sure the kid beside him isn't another Roberto Clemente; and who can ever know how many potential Great Ones have gone down in the obscurity of their neighborhoods? And so, in the catcher's phrase, we "buried the grave" rather then contribute to any further tragedy. In all likelihood the next right fielder, whoever he'd be, would be clumsy too, and if there was a mound to trip over he'd find it and break *his* neck, and soon right field would get the reputation as haunted, a kind of sandlot Bermuda Triangle, inhabited by phantoms calling for ghostly fly balls, where no one but the most desperate outcasts, already on the verge of suicide, would be willing to play.

Still, despite our efforts, we couldn't totally disguise it. A fresh grave is stubborn. Its outline remained visible—a scuffed baldspot that might have been confused for an aberrant pitcher's mound except for the bat jammed in the earth with the mitt and blue cap fit over it. Perhaps we didn't want to eradicate it completely—a part of us was resting there. Perhaps we wanted the new right fielder, whoever he'd be, to notice and wonder about who played there before him, realizing he was now the only link between past and future that mattered. A monument, epitaph, flowers wouldn't be necessary.

As for us, we walked back, but by then it was too late—getting on to supper, getting on to the end of summer vacation, time for other things, college, careers, settling down and raising a family. Past thirty-five the talk starts about being over the hill, about a graying Hoyt Wilhelm in his forties still fanning them with the knuckler as if it's some kind of miracle, about Pete Rose still going in head-first at thirty-seven beating the odds. And maybe the talk is right. One remembers Mays, forty and a Met, dropping that can-of-corn fly in the '71 Series, all that grace stripped away and with it the conviction, leaving a man confused and apologetic about the boy in him. It's sad to admit it ends so soon, but everyone knows those were the lucky ones. Most guys are washed up by seventeen. □

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Listening to Owls

On the morning after the winter solstice, two hours before sunrise, moon full, I stood on frozen feet beside a pine grove in southern Indiana and listened for owls. The pine boughs were dark featherings on darkness. Every winter weed and bush in the meadow cast a pale moon-shadow. Burst milkweed pods hung upon last year's stems like giant commas. Breath haloed about my face in the five-degree air. In such stillness an owl could hear the footpads of mice, the rustling of rabbits, but I with my clumsy ears could hear nothing.

The friend who had brought me to this owl country—Don Whitehead, a husky man with sun-creases around his eyes, who indulges his passion for the outdoors by teaching ecology—cupped gloved hands to his mouth and uttered a long cry, rather like the noise a strangled rooster might make. This was the barred owl's call, which bird books will tell you sounds like a guttural rendering of "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?" But don't let the cozy sentences fool you. The cry of the barred owl, even the counterfeit cry my friend Don was making, resembles no human speech. It is night-speech. So there we stood, on the longest night of the year, two grown men hooting into the darkness and listening.

Presently a cow answered, lowing mournfully. Next a dog yapped, then two more, then a fourth, all at a great distance from us and seemingly from all four points of the compass. We were surrounded by domestication. When a rooster chimed in, I began to despair of owls. Gingerly, afraid my iced toes might shatter, I rocked from foot to foot.

Don motioned for me to keep still. Dogs, cow, and rooster also obligingly hushed. A moonlit smile stole across his face. He pointed, away from the pine woods and across the meadow, toward a cedar-topped ridge. I faced where he pointed, shut my eyes, and listened, listened so hard my shivering body grew calm. What I heard sounded at first like a distant creek splashing over rocks. I disappeared into my listening. The water-sound grew sharper, divided into syllables, spoke to me at last in the sixty-million-year-old voice of an owl.

Sixty million years is only an estimate, of course, and might be off by an eon or two. The bones of owls, like those of all other birds, are hollow and flimsy, and consequently make poor fossils. Reading the rocks, scientists find dinosaurs by the truckload, seashells and gigantic ferns by the long ton, but scant trace of birds. Some dinosaurs had wings, but they must have been clumsy fliers. Maybe they could not truly fly, but had to climb trees or cliffs and then leap in one hungry swoop onto their prey.

Some one hundred eighty million years ago, one of these winged dinosaurs lay down in the mud and left its fossilized imprint, including a toothed jaw, a long bony tail, and the ghostly trace of feathers. Feathers! Here was a new invention, and a durable one, to judge by the chickadee on my windowsill. Life shoving through the sluggish bodies of dinosaurs—so the scientists theorize—chopped off the heavy tail, feathered the wings, hollowed the bones, and eventually produced birds. This takes some getting used to, holding dinosaur and bird together in the mind, a lumbering swamp monster on one side and an ounce of fluff on the other, with a dotted line connecting them. But next time you get close to a pigeon, or any other patient bird, notice the reptilian scales on its legs, and see if you don't catch a whiff of ancient mud.

While the barred owl called, I shook, as if I were a plucked string. Of course the five-degree weather probably had something to do with my shaking. But mainly it was that night-voice plucking at the strings of wonder and dread in me. Listening in that moonshadowed meadow, the grasses and weeds curling from the soil like delicate brush-strokes, I understood why so many ancient peoples regarded the owl's cry as an omen of death.

In the old days, when the Chinese heard that cry they called it "digging a grave," and knew an owl was on its way to snatch some dying soul. Australian Aborigines believed that owls trafficked only in the souls of women, the souls of men being reserved for bats. Sicilians used to say that an owl cry meant an ailing person would die within three days. If nobody in the neighborhood was sick, well then, somebody would come down with tonsil trouble; no point in wasting an evil omen. The Old Testament warned the Israelites not to eat owls, lumping them with vultures as pariahs of the waste lands. Sumerians and Hebrews associated owls with Lilith, the goddess of death, who struck in the night. This death-dealing hag became, in the Middle Ages, a witch, and the owl became one of her familiars, a worker of wickedness.

"Death's dreadful messenger," that's what Edmund Spenser called the bird. And Shakespeare found it difficult to murder anyone on stage without the help of a preliminary announcement from owls. The king's murder in *Macbeth,* for example, is accompanied by the shriek of an owl, "the fatal bellman which gives the stern'st goodnight."

Even the word *owl* is funereal, coming as it does from a Latin root meaning "to howl," the same root that gives us *ululation*—the sound of wailing and lamentation. The birds have not helped their reputation any by showing a fondness for nesting in ruins and graveyards. Their flight is silent, thanks to the downy edge of their primary feathers and oversized wings. Like death, they arrive unannounced and gobble their victims whole.

These are not comforting details to recollect at two hours before sunrise, with your extremities frozen and ice forming in your arteries and the whole universe seized by a winter that might last forever, not comforting at all, especially if you are given,

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as I am, to brooding about death even in daylight and without the aid of owls.

Don yelped his strangled-rooster cry again. I flinched. He grinned—not at me, it turned out, but at the voice of a second barred owl which joined the first in a courting duet. The twin songs spiraled about one another, twisting the birds together in a rope of desire. At the far end of that rope, if things worked out, would be a nest, eggs, four weeks of incubation, and two or three owlets looking like handfuls of dandelion fluff. So here were voices crying at the other gate, the gate of birth rather than death. Night and Eros also go together. A century ago, in the streets of London, if you had inquired about "owls" you would have been led to a brothel. Night hags bring the big death, nightwalkers bring the small one.

Once they tuned up, our pair of lovers kept hooting yearnfully, like Romeo and Juliet in their balcony scene. What business did I have eavesdropping on this erotic serenade? How would I like finding them perched one midnight on my bedroom windowsill, their radar-dish ears catching every rustle of my sheets? But I had no intention of budging from that icy meadow so long as they kept singing. Now that love had been introduced, I could hear enough gaiety in their call to understand why Audubon, trailing barred owls in the swamps of Louisiana, compared their cry "to the affected bursts of laughter which you may have heard from some of the fashionable members of our own species."

If you listen to recordings of owls you will hear an eerie babel of moans and cackling, snores and screeches. There are about one hundred thirty species worldwide in sizes ranging from sparrow to eagle, and they speak in as many dialects as people do. Some of the voices are liquid trills. Others resemble the harsh buzz of locusts. Some make you think of murder victims, sirens, the sickening squeal cars make before a crash. Defending their nests, many owls snap their bills, clicking like geiger-counters. Burrowing owls, which like to set up house in abandoned prairie dog tunnels, scare away predators by hissing like a rattlesnake. With wings spread and tail ruffled, a hissing owl might remind other predators rather uncomfortably of a wildcat. Saw-whet owls derive their name from the saw-sharpening whine they make. More than one early traveler in the American wilderness reports having been fooled by this bird-whistle into thinking a sawmill was just ahead.

Owls do all this muttering for purposes of courtship, as our yearnful pair of barreds were doing, and also for establishing territory. Wolves mark out the boundaries of their turf by urinating and defecating. Humans build fences and guard-posts. Owls, more fastidious than either, embroider the edges of their territory with song. They also fly their boundaries, regular as mailmen. When threatened, they will cry out like sirens to announce alarms. Nestlings clamor for food in the universally raucous manner of the young. Nocturnal owls often sing for a spell at dusk before the evening's hunt, like children at hide-and-seek counting to a hundred before going in search of victims.

They probably conduct other business with their hoots and gurgles—commenting on the weather, say, or estimating the population of field mice—including business we will never understand. Taken all together, the vocabulary of owls is about as complex as that of the average telephone conversation. Once you've spoken about hunger and fear, weather and territory, sex and death, what more is there to say?

Listening to screech owls beside Walden Pond, Thoreau was reminded of wailing women and mournful lovers, as if their call "were the dark and tearful side of music." Others have heard melancholy in these voices. The Kootenay Indians used to warn that children crying in the night would be mistaken by owls for their own young and be carried away. (I tried this warning on my three-year-old, but he seemed to like the idea of being snatched out of bed and flown high above the night-country). A brooding and sometimes melancholy bird himself, Thoreau welcomed the screech owls, saying, "They give me a sense of the variety and capacity of that nature which is our common dwelling."

Screech owls do not actually screech, but gently whinny, or give a voiceless, quavering whistle, like the syncopated whooshing sound of a revolving door. Fans of science fiction movies might be reminded of the sounds flying saucers are supposed to make. My friend Don had perfected that call as well. He had spent his teen years in the Adirondacks imitating birds, the way ordinary teenagers imitate television comedians or rock singers. When the barred owls tired of their love-duet and fell silent, Don gave a tremulous whistle. Within moments a screech owl whistled back, as if to say, "I thought you'd never call." This time the voice rose from the pine woods, so we shifted around to face the shaggy boughs. It would probably be a solitary male, staking out his territory. The whistling came only once more. Here I am, he was announcing. This is my realm of bugs and frogs and field-mice. Don spoke back to him, but the owl apparently had said his say. The pines bristled silently in the moonlight.

Audubon once carried a live screech owl in his coat pocket from Philadelphia to New York, over land and water, feeding it by hand. Audubon did things like that. On one occasion he was presented with a live duck. Lacking any other place to store it, he carried the bird half a day under his tophat. (I specify that both duck and owl were alive, since Audubon's ordinary method of studying birds, like that of all early ornithologists, was to shoot first and ask scientific questions later. "I have not shot but have seen a Hawk of great size entirely *new*—" he wrote to his wife from Florida, and then added hopefully, "—may perhaps kill him tomorrow." He sometimes shot upwards of three hundred birds to secure one fine specimen for illustration). He once fell into quicksand while chasing a great horned owl. The slime was up to his armpits before someone heard his cries and pulled him out. Audubon held no grudge against the bird, to judge from his portrait of a male and female pair. They stare at you regally from the page, "ear" tufts erect, yellow-rimmed eyes somewhat crossed, feathers subtle as fine-threaded tapestry.

Studying those eyes, you can see where owls get their reputation for wisdom. We guess at the intelligence of strangers by watching their eyes. Here are two strangers, these Audubon owls, who bore holes through you with their stare. You could use either face for a mantra, lose yourself among the concentric rings of feathers. Their eyes proclaim that they know exactly who they are and what they

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are about. They have seen to the heart of things, while we grope around on the surface. Since the eyes of owls are fixed in their sockets, the bird must swivel its entire head in order to look to the side or rear. You receive no sly glances from an owl, but always a full stare. Its neck is so flexible that it can even gaze directly behind itself, thus keeping watch on the past. When a cartoon owl gazes at me and poses its cartoon question—"Whooo?"—I wish I had as clear an answer as the owl appears to have. Like all wild creatures, owls are serenely and unambiguously themselves. They do not suffer from existential angst. They do not wake themselves up four hours early and fly into town in hopes of hearing the overtones of truth in human chatter.

But are owls wise? The Greeks thought so, identifying them with Athena, goddess of wisdom. In medieval illustrations, owls accompany Merlin and share in his sorcery. In fairytales they rival the fox for cunning. Children's picture books show them wearing spectacles, mortarboard, and scholar's gown. Soups and other confections made from owls have been credited with curing whooping cough, drunkenness, epilepsy, famine, and insomnia. The Cherokee Indians used to bathe their children's eyes with a broth of owl feathers to keep the kids awake at night. Recipes using owl eggs are reputed to bestow keen eyesight and wisdom. Yet these birds are no smarter, ornithologists assure us, than most others. A museum guide in Boston once displayed a drowsy-looking barn owl on his gloved wrist, explaining to those of us assembled there how small the bird's brain actually was. "You'll notice the head of this live specimen appears to be about the size of a grapefruit," he said, "but it's mostly feathers." Lifting his other hand, he added, "The skull, you see, is the size of a lemon. There's only room enough inside for a bird-brain, not enough for Einstein!" We all laughed politely. But I was not convinced. Sure, the skull was small. The lower half was devoted to jaw and most of the upper half to beak and eye-holes. Yet enough neurons could be fitted into the remaining space to enable the barn owl to catch mice in total darkness. They can even snatch bats on the wing, these princes of night-time stealth. We had to invent sonar for locating submarines, radar for locating airplanes; neither is much use with mice or bats. Barn owls can also see dead—and therefore silent—prey in light one-hundredth as bright as we would need. Like the ability to saw a board square or judge the consistency of bread dough, that might not amount to scholarship, but it is certainly a wisdom of the body. It has worked for some sixty million years. Farmers in Scandinavia, not caring about I.Q., often build roosts and special doors near the peaks of their barns for these efficient rodent-killers.

Most likely the reason we give owls credit for wisdom is because they look like us. Behold the rounded head, the prominent eyes set in front, a disk of feathers radiating outward from each eye like cheeks, dark slashes across the forehead like eyebrows, the lethal beak protruding only far enough to resemble a nose. Aha, we think, here are feathered, midget versions of ourselves; they must be smart. I suppose the owls, noting the same resemblance, would assume we are expert killers, and they would be right.

You can't judge owls by appearance. Their daytime faces—glimpsed in zoos and museums and books, occasionally on birds I discover at their perches—don't match the night-time voices Don and I were hearing. The face of a screech owl could belong to Cotton Mather or some other Puritan divine, full of wrath and fiery judgment, yet its quavering whistle falls as forgivingly as rain. Round facial markings make the barred owl look like a pilot in goggles, jet black eyes fresh from outer-space, rotund head filled with unearthly lore. Yet when I hear the "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?" cry, I can only think of lovers yodeling beneath balconies or strangling from disappointment. Barn owls, with faces pale and heart-shaped as old valentines, look like sad elves. But their repertoire of cries includes a screech that will set your teeth on edge and stiffen your neck hairs.

One of these elfin-looking barn owls once scared me nearly witless. I was camping with some other boys on a ridge overlooking the Mahoning River in northern Ohio. The sun was down. We'd made a fire, the light splashing on the undersides of sycamore leaves, and while we sat with our backs towards the dark woods, my father was telling us a ghost story. I can't remember the gory details, but the story climaxed with a squadron of ghouls pouncing on some unsuspecting boys as they sat around a campfire. "And the blood-drinking ghosts hooked their claws in the sycamore bark," my father was whispering, "and they spied down on those poor boys, kind of sizing them up. And then the ghosts tilted forward just a little bit on the sycamore limbs, and they"—my father's voice suddenly rose to a shout—"JUMPED!" We jumped. Then *he* jumped, as a scream burst over our heads, so loud it seemed to crack the night open. My heart quit, lungs quit, brain played turtle in my skull. I was doing my best to imitate a rock, so the blood-sucking ghouls would nab the guy next to me. Only when the scream sounded again, farther away, down along the river, did I open my eyes. The other boys looked like prisoners of war, like pale stowaways who had just come blinking onto deck. My father's voice still shook as he explained, "It was just a barn owl. I expect we scared it off its roost."

Don and I heard no barn owls on the night of the winter solstice. Never common in the Middle West, this prowler has become even scarcer in recent years due to pesticide-poisoning. Like all predators, owls are near the top of the food-chain, and so they gobble toxins in concentrated doses. We're predators, too, feeding on the whole of nature. Although we don't eat owls, we poison them, with chemicals designed to protect our corn from worms, our apples from blemishes. One price of the perfection we expect on our dinner table is the death of night-hunters, the death of singers, the death of birds that impersonate ghosts.

We did hope to rouse a great-horned owl before daylight. Don knew a likely place, a hillside planted to sweetgum and pine, about a mile from the ridge where we had listened to the barred and screech owls. So we hiked the mile on ice-cake feet, scaring up a rabbit and a meadowlark along the way. Although the sun was rising, the temperature wasn't. The messages coming from my hands and feet were as shrill as the static on a shortwave radio during electrical storms.

By the time we reached the hillside, both eastern and western horizons were glowing, with rising sun and setting moon. The tips of pines

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and cedars fretted the skyline like saw-teeth. It was a dangerous hour, this lull between night and day, for any beast small enough to become owl food. Rabbits, squirrels, porcupines, skunks, mice and rats, snakes and all manner of birds, any of these might provide breakfast for the great horned owl. Here is a formidable bird, growing to a height of two feet and a wingspan of nearly five, capable of killing (but not carrying) animals that outweigh it. Pound-for-pound—as announcers say about bantam-weight boxers—this character is fiercer than a mountain lion. Any sort of owl is likely to get mobbed in daytime if smaller birds find it roosting. But great horneds drive crows into a particular frenzy. I once saw fifteen of those braggart birds pestering a great horned owl, diving and jabbering at him until he suddenly lashed out with a taloned foot and sent a ragged clump of feathers tumbling. Unenlightened, the fourteen survivors resumed their pestering, and the owl dispatched two more before they left. If you have the bad luck or bad judgment to climb into its nesting tree while the youngsters are about, the great horned will greet you with a wallop and give your head and arms a good raking.

A friend of mine, a gangling man who assembles color televisions for a living and who has lost two wives because of his passion for birding, told me about meeting a great horned owl in a tulip tree. He had climbed the tree before dawn to wait to photograph the sunrise over Lake Monroe. There he waited, on a morning warmer than the one Don and I had picked for owling, his legs straddling a limb and his back against the trunk. Presently, the branch just above his head shook, as if someone had given it a single karate chop. Looking up, he saw the solemn bird. It was scanning the territory, head tilted forward and slowly pivoting, ear-tufts raised like twin antennae, saucer eyes making a murderous survey of the lakeside. When it spied my friend, the owl glanced casually away, and then did a comical double-take. For a moment the two perchers stared eye-to-eye, the man calculating whether there was light enough for a photo, the bird probably calculating whether this gawky beast would do for breakfast. Evidently deciding no, the owl gave a noncommittal hoot and flew away. My friend was lucky this was a hunting rather than a nesting tree, for had he approached the nest, the bird would probably have mauled him.

The great horned owl typically gives a gurgling call of one, two, and then three notes, as if it were learning to count. Don, as you might have guessed, can gurgle convincingly, and did so, on that brightening hillside. No answer. He tried again and again, pausing between calls, but the great horned owls had apparently clocked out for the night. I was so ecstatic with sunrise and moonset, so intoxicated with the night-voices we had already heard, that I would have turned entirely to ice before giving up on this last of our neighborhood owls. Don patiently crowed, I rocked on numb legs, the sun opened in the east like the mouth of a furnace. At last a gurgling voice answered from the woods. When I finally distinguished the sound, I realized I had been hearing it for several minutes, but had not recognized it amidst the wind noises and the chatter of awakening songbirds. Guessing the direction, I peered intently, hoping to catch a glimpse of the bird. The song unraveled for five minutes or more, and then came to an abrupt end. In the first moment of quiet I saw a huge shadow rise above the treetops, wings large enough for an angel. It flapped once, twice, and then swerved and was gone. I blinked, wondering if I had really seen it, or only conjured it out of the dawn sky. But Don had seen it, too. Beside me he was murmuring, "Wonderful, wonderful!"

When I try to explain to friends why I rise so early of a December day to go shiver in the owl-haunted woods, I find that those who have to ask my reasons cannot be made to understand them. When you sit near a waterfall, with the mist playing over your skin and the roar shaking your spine, you either realize that this is one of the authentic experiences, one of the touchstones for all living, or you don't. If you don't feel that thrill in the presence of a waterfall, or a stand of virgin timber, or a mountain peak, or a calling owl, then no explanation on earth will make you feel it.

Think of it, carrying on half of a love-duet with a bird. There you stand in your human shape, flightless and nightblind, conversing with a killer that navigates through darkness. Our literature and film are crowded with aliens from outer space, tentacled and bug-eyed, possessed of mysterious powers. But is any of these extraterrestrials stranger than an owl? Until visitors actually arrive from some remote planet, let me talk with owls or whales or even Sufis, and I will find my conversation alien enough. Such talk makes *us* the visitors, the invaders from Ultima Thule. The owl cannot speak in our tongue, but we can speak in his. The creation lures us out of ourselves, while the owl remains tucked snugly in the pouch of his instincts. He only speaks to us because we have entered his precinct, gone out to meet him, put off for a while our human garments and assumed his.

Chilled and triumphant, Don and I hiked back toward the car, neither of us speaking, as if we had tacitly agreed to keep the owls in our ears as long as possible. Our path took us along the shore of the lake, where cattails and reeds stood rigid in a frozen border of ice. In the deeper parts, waves lapped against the hem of ice with the sound of polite applause. In the shallow bays, where ice glinted like gun-metal from shore to shore, steam rising from the surface turned rose and violet in the early sunlight. It was like the smoke from incense, an offering fit for owl-gods or any other deities. Here and there a whirlwind lifted columns of steam twenty or thirty feet into the air. The spouts trailed across the ice, sinuous as snakes, and then collapsed back into the lower mists.

As the light grew stronger, we noticed that near the lake's edge the black ice was covered with a rough white fur. Bending closer, we could see that the fur was really a miniature forest of ice crystals, each crystal fern-shaped, a tiny glistening lattice. The boughs of this frozen forest were so delicate that they swayed when I breathed on them. The tallest thicket of crystals was no higher than the knuckle on a flattened hand, yet within those pygmy thickets there was more intricacy than the eye could follow.

Every weed and twig on the shore was covered with the same fragile wafers of ice. I plucked a stem of foxtail grass and held it between me and the sun. The light shattered on the crystals as I gently twirled the stem; a sliver of ice, thinner than an eyelash, broke the glow from a hydrogen explosion into rainbows. Soon the frost on my foxtail melted. Before

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Do you know these people?

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my very eyes the ice forest was evaporating from the margins of the lake, a disappearing-trick more astonishing than any Saturday-afternoon magic. The mists and spouts over the frozen bays were thinning away. I wanted to seize this moment of ice-beauty, hold it still for my perpetual delight. But it would not linger, any more than the owls would.

All the way up the hillside, whenever I turned to face the sun, I saw ice crystals needling through the air. Blown or shaken loose from trees, they drifted slantwise like silver seeds, like migrating sparks.

We heard, arising from somewhere near the car, the raucous scolding of blue jays. "They're pestering something," said Don. "A hawk?" I guessed. "Or an owl maybe," he said.

Putting off our weariness, we jogged on numb legs toward the noise. There were six or eight jays swooping and squawking about the hollow crown of a dead beech. "That's got to be an owl tree," Don whispered.

At our approach, the jays spiraled away, screeching indignantly. Don and I circled the beech in opposite directions, eyes alert for any movement in the tree's rot-blackened top. But we met on the far side of the circle without having spied anything. "You go beat on the trunk with a stick," Don suggested, "and I'll keep watch." "How would a great horned owl, say, feel about somebody come knocking on his tree?" I asked. "He wouldn't like it one bit," Don allowed. "What's he likely to do about it?" The creases about Don's eyes deepened. "He's likely to come out fast," he said, "too fast for messing with you or me, and then he's going to disappear in about half a blink."

Unreassured, I picked up a stout branch from the ground, approached the hollow beech, and gave the trunk a polite thwack. "Hit it hard," Don urged. So I grasped the stick with both hands and slammed the tree a few homerun blows. Between strokes I glanced up, to catch a glimpse of anything that might fly from the rotten peak. Or anything that might come plummeting down on me, talons lowered for the kill. Nothing flew, nothing plummeted. After a few more thumps, Don called, "It's no use. If the jays had an owl in there, it was gone before we got here."

I dropped the stick, feeling a little ashamed, as if, in the daylight, I had tried to summon up by brute force what only patience and stillness had been able to summon up in the darkness. The hollow beech was a reminder, if I needed a reminder, that owls will not be bullied. You can hoot at them until you're blue in the face, but they will only answer when they please, if they please. Talking with them is like soliciting a word from the gods. There are rituals to be observed, such as choosing the right season of year and time of day. Certain owl-callers, like certain priests, enjoy better luck than others. But after you have made all your preparations, you can only wait. If the owls choose to remain invisible and silent, then, like the gods, silent and invisible they will remain. There are no switches you can throw to make them perform. They fly their own missions, speak their own messages, with no more regard for us than the moon has.

From the car, I turned to look back down at the lake. The mists had now almost all dissolved away into daylight. The whirlwinds of steam had ceased their revels. In the ragged patches of open water near the middle of the lake, a few ducks and geese congregated. The two bald eagles spotted here this season would find the hunting poor. Another week of freezing weather would close the lake entirely, driving water birds south, and the eagles after them. But the owls would stay on. Adaptable, stealthy, expert at killing and not overly particular about what they eat, they would endure. They *will* endure. By keeping to the night-side, owls avoid their one dangerous enemy—us, lords of the day-side. So long as there are woods, and not too much poison, there will be owls. So long as there are owls, we can hear night-voices and remain humble.

"I rejoice that there are owls," says Thoreau. "Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized." Most of us still don't recognize that "undeveloped nature," that nature which dances and unfurls its life without regard to human purposes. We can't hear the earth sing above all the racket our species makes. Listening to owls is a cure for such deafness. —*Scott Sanders*

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A Poet's Perspective
An Interview with Henry Chapin

At 89, Henry Chapin may well be America's oldest practicing poet; perhaps the oldest in the English language. His career has taken him from New England, to the Paris and England of the '20s, where he was the familiar of people like Robert Graves, William Masefield and F. Scott Fitzgerald, back to the United States, where he was a friend of Robert Frost's, living part of the year in Florida, and the remainder on his farm in Bucks County. From Bucks County, he moved to Stonington, Connecticut. He stayed there until his recent move to Peterborough, New Hampshire, an area he came to love over his periods in residence at the MacDowell Colony, where he sat for the following interview. Among his many books is a collection of poems, The Constant God, *and an autobiographical rumination,* Countdown At 80, *both published by William L. Bauhan, Dublin, New Hampshire. From the rich perspective of his four score and eight, Chapin continues to work on new poems, and a book on the life of Epicurus, to whom he bears a striking physical resemblance.* —E.M. Broner & Paul Pines

Love

INTERVIEWER: From the perspective of your eighty-eight years, could you tell us something about love.

CHAPIN: I never talk much about it. In other words, I don't know. Every now and then people are driven into each other's arms out of loneliness, desire and God knows what—they almost get there and don't quite, but it's better than not.

INT: How have your lovers affected you?

CHAPIN: Don't ask me about that. I'm no great lover. Jesus. Eros Flynn is dead.

INT: You say, "We almost get there and don't."

CHAPIN: Well, I mean . . . we almost get anywhere in life and don't. It's like divining God. I think the world would be better off if we used our cerebellum less. Who's ever defined love? My daughters have asked me, "What do you know about loving women, Dad?" And I say, "I don't know a damn thing, except I have some very profound suspicions."

INT: Like what?

CHAPIN: Well, people need each other. The big question mark in love is this: Can you stand naked before another person and expect not to be betrayed? It's all mixed up with friendship. Friendship is on the way to love. And how can we get possessive jealousy out of two people loving each other? If we can handle that, we've got it licked.

INT: Talk about friendship.

CHAPIN: Friendship is where you trust yourself absolutely to another person. You can have all kinds of warm acquaintanceships, but eventually somebody might take a little advantage of you, knock you, get sore or something. In friendship, you swallow a person whole. I think in loving a person you try to swallow them whole, but you never can because the more you love them the greater they become and the harder to swallow.

INT: That's lovely.

CHAPIN: And that's why all sexual relationships are so delicate, so open to pain. There's nobody can injure us so as somebody we love.

INT: Do you feel, then, that the stance in love is a protective stance?

CHAPIN: I think we're all lost children who need to grab each other and go to bed and love each other, and sacrifice for each other. In other words, I think men and women need each other.

INT: What about the element of antagonism here?

CHAPIN: You can only be hurt by people that really love you, or you love them, or hurt them. You know, the little word, the little thing dropped at the right moment. You have such tender awareness of them, you can do murder . . . very lightly and easily almost.
But have it out, have your fight, for God's sakes, and face each other. You can't help it.

INT: Is that what you did?

CHAPIN: I was married 50 years to a very warm, impulsive, powerful woman. We loved each other. We fought. We had beautiful fights. I only had one experience, and that experience is now finished. I was an old, old man—you'll excuse me for interjecting this—I don't mean to, but here I am. You can love somebody, but you don't fall in love anymore . . . you don't have to go over Niagara in a barrel.
All right, now. I've said all I have to say.

INT: We're asking because your point in time and life experience are different from ours.

CHAPIN: We're all rolling stones, but I've gathered a little more moss.

INT: And how does that feel?

CHAPIN: I don't know. I'm still questioning. My God. I've got more questions to solve than I had as a 12-year-old boy. More than ever, in my life, as I get older, more and more the marvel, the question of who and what in hell is a human being! Where did he come from? Where is he going? Then you come plumb up against the great escapist thing that is deep in every human being, the kind of individualistic person I am

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A new collection by Henry Chapin, The Haunt of Time: Chosen Poems, Old and New, *has recently been published by William L. Bauhan.*

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today, that nobody else can possibly be, and at the same time look down there and see myself a . . . a corpse, disappearing back into this earth.

Roots

INT: I see you're reading Job. Are you thinking more now about religion than you had?

CHAPIN: Not a formal religion, no. I was brought up in a vacuum, a religious vacuum. On the other hand with a religious morality. I learned certain things from my parents, my father first. Self-pity was ignoble. Everybody carried his own stuff.

INT: Yes, you were telling me about the poets you disliked because they were full of self-pity, picking their scabs. Is that because your parents hated self-pity?

CHAPIN: They weren't narrow, rigid, puritanical people, but they were brought up in a strictly New England atmosphere. My father I discovered loved me—later; I didn't know it at the time. He'd smack us if he had to. We always kissed him goodnight.

INT: But you were taught to contain your feelings?

CHAPIN: You had a face to maintain, a New England face.

INT: How did you deal with the feelings beneath that face?

CHAPIN: As a child I had ghastly nightmares, but I think most children do after the age of 12. My mother didn't understand. She thought it must've been something I ate. She didn't know all these nightmares came out of leaving the house in the morning at the age of six, walking to school, and having to face a more or less hostile world there. Just as much as any Jewish boy brought up in an Irish district, or any Negro brought up in a Polish district, I had to face constant harrassment by the Irish that were taking over Springfield. I was a Wasp who lived on the hill and lived better, and the mothers of these boys worked in our kitchen.
My mother would say, "Henry, why do you fight all the time? Your clothes . . . you got blood on your clothes, and they were fresh this morning." And I'd say, "Ma, I don't fight." She'd say, "You don't fight?" "No. The Bresnahan brothers knocked the bejesus . . . (I didn't say *bejesus*), . . . I can't help it." She said, "Just try not to." So we finally organized our own gang, put rocks in our snowballs, froze them, put lead slugs in our slingshots . . . I come up here, and these kids, these New York kids, say, "Oh, yes, you're one of those special remote Yankee types that never really faced anything."

INT: What is it in your New England background that separates, or connects you to other people?

CHAPIN: Look, we've had 200 years to get over our Puritanism. The Irish are just beginning to. The Jews, flocking around Freud, are getting over their terrific, fierce parochialism. All right. We've gotten over our bloody Puritanism 150 years ago. It's turned into a sort of milk and water, Unitarian stuff.

INT: You and me . . . what connects and separates us?

CHAPIN: It would only be a matter of dialect that separates us. I've talked to kids up here that have degrees, had trouble communicating. I think they suspect me of being different than I am. They label me.

INT: Really?

CHAPIN: I tell you who labeled me, and that's this girl from the coast. What's her name, Tillie Olson.

INT: What did she say, the girl from the coast?

CHAPIN: There was a smart girl that came up here, dressed in black, very smart. The first two evenings she was here, she held my hand because I was old and had been here [MacDowell] before and I'd be important to her. She held my hand and said, "You're gonna help me a lot getting acclimated here." And I said, "Yes, dear." The next day she's having lunch with Tillie Olson. After that, she hardly spoke to me. I found out later Tillie Olson said, "Pay no attention to Henry Chapin, he's just an old Yankee still dragging his way around here, and he has no understanding of what we girls understand—poverty, struggle." I know Tillie had a hard life, but she's made a thing of it.

INT: She cut you out with that assumption, is that what you're saying?

CHAPIN: Yes. Hannah Green says she's a fine woman. I would like to have made friends with Tillie Olson, but there wasn't a prayer.

INT: Have there been people, friends, in your life who squeezed your heart?

CHAPIN: I've had close male friends, but not what you'd call grab-your-heart-and-squeeze-it. I've had women friends that were not my wife, naturally . . . but I was closest to my wife. We were married 50 years. In the '20s we lived on $2,000 a year, in third class hotels with dirty halls, but for 50 years we had a close-knit family; three children, eight grandchildren, my children getting divorced, we having raised the grandchildren. We were a family. Until she died, really, it was in 1970. Then I tried living alone for 10 years. Not so hot. But what else? I was 75 years old. What else? I had the choice probably of marrying some well-off, blue-haired woman who had cocktail parties and went on cruises, but I could never have adjusted to it.

INT: Of course not.

CHAPIN: I'm not sorry for myself. I'm the luckiest bastard in the world. I reached the age of 87 when the family were looking at me thinking, "I wonder if Dad would like to go into a condominium where he can get real care." They knew I couldn't afford to have a blue-haired breathy dame taking care of me—or wouldn't. So I said, "I'm going to do something about it." Now I've got a little apartment up here, with Winnie. She treats me like the family and it's great. Where I am today, I'm the luckiest bastard in the world.

INT: So, Henry, who squeezes your heart?

CHAPIN: My heart, my heart, I remember it well. I don't see why you should sit here and dissect my palpitating heart.

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INT: Have you had any mentors, Henry?

CHAPIN: I always liked certain people. Frost's poetry has meant a lot to me. But, of course, I knew him well. We took care of him for months after his wife died. And I managed to stay friendly with him, which was a great art. 'Cause he was a fierce, antagonistic person.

INT: When did you meet?

CHAPIN: I met him in the '30s . . . till he died.

INT: You were close?

CHAPIN: We took care of him after his wife died. He visited us in Florida.

INT: What was he like?

CHAPIN: Fierce. I had to interrupt him one morning. I never did when he was working. This morning I had to. He opened the door and he looked at me and he said, "What do you want?" I said, "Robert, you asked me to take you this afternoon down to Key West and I haven't heard a word and I have to know." "No, I haven't decided." Well, I said, "I wish you would decide because I have to know, darn . . ." He said, "No." "Alright," I said, "Robert, I'm very sorry I interrupted your workin'." He said, "*Workin'?* Nobody ever caught me workin'!" and he slammed the door in my face. Typical Frost. He had that fierce, secretive thing. *Nobody ever caught him workin'!* Couldn't call it work, cause it was magic to him, and yet, it was nothing but work to him also.

INT: What were you doing in Florida?

CHAPIN: I had terrible arthritis.

INT: And Frost?

CHAPIN: I settled far out in the wild part of the Everglades near Hervey Allen and he wrote me down there. Then Robert came down and had a house there. After his wife died, the three of us were there and we used to visit. He'd come over at night.

INT: You, Frost, and who else?

CHAPIN: Well, Hervey Allen, occasionally. He was a great friend. He was the one who introduced us.

INT: Who was Hervey Allen?

CHAPIN: Hervey Allen wrote *Anthony Adverse.* Also the best book on Poe. I knew Hervey from way back. Hell, I first met him in Bermuda when he was writing *Anthony Adverse.* I knew a lot of people. Graves.

INT: Where'd you meet Graves?

CHAPIN: I lived on Boars Hill for two, three years with Graves, Masefield, Blunden, that whole bunch.

INT: That was before he went to Mallorca?

CHAPIN: Yeah. He wrote *Goodbye To All That* and went over there and then that Laura Riding got a hold of him—she fed off sick intellectuals.

INT: Laura Riding?

CHAPIN: Writer. Feminist. Everything. An evil woman. I saw her destroy two families. Graves' and then another one. She taught me the nature of evil, which is willpower run mad.

INT: Did she hurt Graves?

CHAPIN: I don't know whether she hurt him or not. She pulled him together. He wrote *The White Goddess* with her, while she was living with him in Mallorca. He was a very neurotic person. I know when he first came out of the war in 1919, he was then seeing visions. Fifty percent psychologically out as far as the pension went. Pulled himself together and made it. Powerful man, beautiful man. Now he's senile, poor dear.

INT: He's written hundreds of books.

Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Williams, Moore, MacLeish, Auden, Jeffers, Cummings, Shapiro, Schwartz, Jarrell, Lowell, Merrill, Thomas, Nemerov, Ashbery, Hecht, Kunitz, Plath, Hall, Ammons, Bishop, Hollander, Meredith, Berryman, Wagoner, Snyder, Van Duyn, Kumin, Wright, Ignatow, Atwood, Pinsky, Dubie, Raab, and Bottoms have something in common.

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CHAPIN: He's a scholar. His grandfather was the great Burkhart.

INT: Jacob Burkhart?

CHAPIN: He was his grandfather on his mother's side. And his father was the Bishop of Limerick. So you have the Irish, you have the German plugging scholarship there, and the wild working Irish all interbred in Graves that made him what he is. And that's what brings the poets in people and the artists, these ghastly high-explosive mixtures that you mustn't juggle.

INT: Who else did you know at that time?

CHAPIN: Robert Bridges was there. William Masefield put on plays with us. That was in London, in 1920 and 1922 or 1923. I came to live there with my wife and an eight-month-old baby we put in a clothes basket. I said, "Dad, I came to tell you Paula and I are going to live with the baby in England in a little cottage. I'm gonna write." He said, "Poetry?" I said, "Yes, Father." He said, "All right, Henry, if you've made up your mind." We went and I finally got my epic written. It's all about what America was like a hundred years ago. Great book. But it's narrative verse. People don't read it today.

INT: Anyone else you remember from that period?

CHAPIN: Oh, Ben Nickerson, I knew him very well. I met Ben in London. Once, he told me, "Henry, I'm divorced from Winifred Howard. The Howard family was on my neck all the time and I wanted to be an artist so I got divorced." I said, "Well, Ben, I don't know Winifred as well as I know you." Then he said, "I remarried, a girl named Hayward, charming, sweet, a lovely girl who is also a very good sculptress. We were going to live quietly as artists. That was my idea a year ago. Last month she had triplets!" I said, "Ben, Ben, the thing that makes me believe in God is the perfect irony of the world."

INT: Triplets!

CHAPIN: "Don't laugh," he said.

INT: Triplets!

CHAPIN: I mean there must be a mastermind. You know, irony is the joke we share with God.

School Days

INT: Weren't you at Princeton?

CHAPIN: Yes. With Scotty Fitzgerald. And later on, in Paris, I knew Scotty and the crowd there. But I couldn't play with them. I was newly married, fairly broke. We were living over a cinema on practically nothing, and these guys were blowing money on liquor and going to Spain. In fact, Paula took care of the kids when any of them went to Spain. When his wife and the kids had flu, Paula went over and helped them. They wanted me to go to Spain with them, but I just couldn't. Yes, I knew Scotty in Princeton. He was in my class. Very sensitive, twisted kind of guy. He had this . . . he couldn't get over this Irish inferiority complex about rich Yankees being somehow . . . better than his own crowd. It was perfectly ridiculous.

INT: How about Zelda?

CHAPIN: That girl was crazy. She was, you know, a girl from Alabama, the pretty, the brilliant, going to be a writer and all this . . . marry the fine young Princeton boy. They went to Paris to make a fortune and ended up crucifying each other. Scott . . . she wanted to be a dancer. Scott was trying to write on half . . . two-thirds a bottle of bourbon a day, getting drunk every night. I don't know how he did it. The stamina of it. He did it. Put out several good books. *Tender Is the Night* is the one I like best.

INT: When did you first see that side of Scott?

CHAPIN: In Princeton. Dean Gauss kept him in. Dean Gauss was great. He promoted [Edmund] Wilson, fostered him, and Dean Gauss took a hold of Scotty; otherwise Scotty'd have been expelled. Gauss was head of the French Department, and a literary man of some distinction. He thought Scott had style and kept him in.

INT: A rare man.

CHAPIN: Gauss? Yes. There are so many phoney academics. You know my story about getting caught with a bunch of young PhDs? Well, they were calling me Dr. Chapin, and I said, "Look, I'm not a PhD, I'm not a doctor." They said, "Oh, you're here with all of us tonight, this is a meeting of academics . . ." I said, "All right, I'll confess. I got it in English." "Oh," they said, "what was your subject?" I said, "Well, I wrote about the codpiece in Elizabethan literature, its rise and fall." And they said, "Oh, how interesting. I don't think that's been covered." I said, "No, it's not really been covered."

INT: Are you anti-Academic?

CHAPIN: How could I be? I had a book published in Germany, a wonderful book on the Gulfstream. Probably the best book I wrote.

INT: On what?

CHAPIN: The Gulfstream, the ocean river. It was published in Germany and, of course, they couldn't just call it *The Ocean River*, they had to call it *Das Gulfstream, Das Gulfstraum*. It's all about its currents, its fishes, its notable men, its navigators, its everything. And then, on the back, they had a picture of me, and they said, ". . . the well known anthropologist . . . Chapin . . ." I was a well-known anthropologist. Das well known Anthropologist Herr Doktor Chapin.

Epilogue

INT: Your life feels good to you now?

CHAPIN: What?

INT: Your life here, it feels good?

CHAPIN: From the waist up, sort of.

INT: All right.

CHAPIN: Legs are very wobbly. I take pills for all kinds of things. I sleep too much. In other words, I'm living. I think I'm living a very good life, for an octogenarian. Let's put it that way. □

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The artist in our time is perhaps more overtly concerned with the apprehension of reality than the philosopher is, and the image of violence seems often an appropriate way of representing his mode of perception.

—Lionel Trilling on Isaac Babel

Forebears: Orwell & Wescott

In the end is my beginning. *1984* I do not call Art, but it is a work whose art I am willing to debate because I am convinced that Orwell was both artist and philosopher, a thinker concerned with the meaning of meaning, like Isaac Rosenfeld, who admired in his time Marx, Freud, and Kenneth Burke. In Rosenfeld I think I behold a perfect union of the artist and philosopher; in Orwell, the need of the moralist detracts from his fiction; his essays and criticism possess his art. It is his essay writing that will keep the reader alive, and for that reason, less sophisticated students are always insisting "Shooting an Elephant" is a short story. *1984* comes rather close, I think, to being a philosophical treatise on language. It is this preoccupation with system, the hermeneutics of brain-washing, that interferes with its art.

In an essay, written probably in 1940, (the editors aren't sure), Orwell speaks about language as "unable to deal with all aspects of reality." He says, "Everyone who thinks at all has noticed that our language is practically useless for describing anything that goes on in the brain." In this respect he appears to be on the same wave length with Aldous Huxley, who dazzled him at Eton when Orwell was not easily dazzled by other instructors or dons. Huxley, in an essay "Words and Their Meaning" refers to a class of words "which are supposed to refer to objects in the outer world or to psychological states but which, in fact, . . . refer only to figments of imagination." He offers "the death instinct" by Freud or the "Chinese dragon" as examples. And Orwell says of this stuff that goes on in the brain that only Gerard Manley Hopkins "is really, if one looks closely, making a desperate attempt to use [words] closely." Later in the same essay Orwell asks: "Is not anyone with any degree of mental honesty conscious of *telling lies* all day long both in talking and in writing simply because *lies will fall into artistic shape* when truth will not? (Emphasis mine) Words, he insists, are not a direct channel of thought, and the method he suggests for inventing new words is "to find a way in which we can give thought objective reality." Is Orwell discovering—in prose—Eliot's objective correlative . . . "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion?" Not exactly. Orwell has no formula because, he insists, "we don't really have names for the nameless feelings that men have in common." He doesn't see man as the symbolizing self, the one (as James Jarret says) who seeks actively to let the word speak to him . . . But he does find a hope, a kind of hope in technology to rescue from the obscurity of sensation and intuition ". . . all the powerful motives which will not go into words and which are a cause of constant lying and misunderstanding . . ." "These could be tracked down," he says, "given form agreed upon," and named by "the film with its limitless powers of representation as the instrument through which thoughts can be given visual shape." Orwell is asking the machine to help us find words. Jarret is suggesting that the word is in the universe, the self extending the self to hear it, to grasp it. Orwell is worried that the complication of our lives is such that our minds develop faster than our language, that our minds perceive what our language cannot name, and we cannot find the time or the energy to name. Jarret is optimistic. Man's reach should exceed his grasp . . . the word will come. Orwell has another vision. For language, and by language he means the spoken and the written word, language as communication, . . . if language cannot name what the mind perceives or conceives, then the mind can develop in devious ways. Is that not what he suggests in "Politics and the English Language," published in 1946? In this essay he eschews the meaning of meaning, the pursuit of the ineffable because he is far more concerned with pinning words down. He has begun to see language as dying, as diseased. His statement concerning language is a moral and political one.

It is almost the same statement Huxley makes at the conclusion of "Words and Their Meanings," when he says, "To learn to use words correctly is to learn among other things the art of immediate excitements and immediate personal triumphs. Much self control and great disinterestedness are needed by those who would realize the ideal of misusing language. Moreover a man who habitually speaks and writes correctly is one who has cured himself, not merely of conscious and deliberate lying, but also (and the task is more difficult and at least as important) of unconscious mendacity." Orwell certainly makes this point in "Politics and the English Language." No longer does he pursue words as much as he pursues people, and then their language. The ominous chord he strikes, as artist, the man who feels, the man who strives to find the hidden corners of a man's soul in a man's use or abuse of language is that men wish "to make murder respectable and lies truthful." They lie because it's easy; they lie because it's profitable; they lie because they do not give a damn. They lie "to defend the indefensible". . .Almost a byword, this last.

Orwell's fascination with language is almost an obsession: Language as a way to permit, to make possible communication, to get nearer the truth of what human beings feel; but evident, in this essay, is the other side of the coin—language as a means to keep men in darkness, in blight, in a state of canned vegetables.

> When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases—'bestial atrocities, iron heel, blood-stained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder'—one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling that suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which

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> seem to hail no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. . . .

And what follows is the germ that will later flourish in *1984* as Duckspeak, noises coming from the throat of the speaker who has no brains at all.

But the essay still ends on a somewhat hopeful note, as does Huxley's. Huxley invokes the names of Gotama and Jesus; Orwell offers exercises to combat the disease of sloppy thinking, which leads to sloppy writing, and sloppy writing contributes further to the degeneration of thought. But his worry concerning language is like an ulcer, and the worry is evident in other essays. For example, in an unsigned editorial to *Polemic* (1946), an editorial in which Orwell criticizes an essay by Prof. T.D. Bernal—physicist, crystallographer, and Marxist—Orwell speaks about the connection between totalitarian habits of thought and the corruption of language. He says: "Like all writers of his school, Prof. Bernal has a strong tendency to drop into Latin when something unpleasant has to be said." Orwell criticizes also the long vague words of political lingo, words "which blur the moral squalor of what is being said." He speaks of another characteristic "of writers friendly to totalitarianism . . . a tendency to play tricks with syntax and produce unbuttoned up or outright meaningless sentences." In this editorial Orwell arrives at "the old, true, and unpalatable conclusion that a communist and a fascist are somewhat nearer to one another than either is to a democrat." This is something the John Birch Society never understood.

I ask three questions of a work: what it says, why it says, and how it says. This what, why, how approach forces me to enter a work from within as well as without. I dare to presume the original secretion in the work. And, in fact, the collected essays reveal that the "why" of *1984* precedes the "what" as early as 1940. But there is another why, really vital to the first . . . the question of power.

In a letter to Roger Senhouse, a director at the firm of Secker & Warburg, publishers, Orwell, objecting to the blurb for *1984*, says: "It makes the book sound as though it were a thriller mixed up with a love story, and I don't intend it to be primarily that. What it is really meant to do is to discuss the implications of dividing the world up into zones of influence (I thought of it as a result of the Teheran Conference), and in addition to indicate by *parodying them* the intellectual implications of totalitarianism." (Emphasis mine) "It has always seemed to me that people have not faced up to these and that, e.g., the persecution of scientists in Russia is simply part of a logical process which should have been foreseeable 10-20 years ago." In an earlier letter to F.J. Warburg, Orwell speaks of *1984* as a novel about the future . . . "that is, it is in a sense a fantasy but in the form of a naturalistic novel. That is what makes it a difficult job."

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Volume III of *Collected Essays* also provides testimony that Orwell worried about the relationship between power and language, that the relationship was almost inevitable, part of the scheme of things, man's fate, wherefore we pick up the word "naturalistic" in his description of *1984*. The "naturalistic" strikes an ominous note. The word "naturalistic" suggests perhaps that Orwell had given up hope that men could be cured of some illnesses. For himself, he was hopeful. He doted on his adopted son. He married a second time. I do not believe his vision of the future did him in. He died of hemorrhage. It was not a sick vision, *sick* because he was sick, but sick because prophetic. It was the world's illness for which he was seeking a cure by describing a natural course of events, what happens to minds deprived of language. And the type of "realism" by which he would describe what happens to men and women deprived of language might, because of its exactness, its attention to detail—the brainwashing, the appendix, the Goldstein book—shock the reader, and thus begin the first step toward the cure. But the work is also fantasy. The artist apprehends reality, and reality is a line that moves from the present into the future. A phenomenon already perceivable in 1948 . . . give the germ forty more years.

I find nowhere in the collected essays of George Orwell a reference to Bentham, but so kindred is their view of the way men use words, so parallel their probing of language that if Orwell does not acknowledge Bentham it is because he has absorbed him. Or we can say, that Orwell and Bentham discovered the same wheel. It is Bentham from whom we first hear "the defense of the undefensible" in *The Book of Fallacies*, the section where he explains Impostor Terms (ad Judicium).

> This fallacy is similar to the one which has just been exposed, but it is applied chiefly to the defense of things which under their proper names are manifestly indefensible. For instance, persecutors in matters of religion have no such word as persecution in their vocabularies: zeal is the word by which they characterize all their actions.

Sophistry has always been the defense of the indefensible. "Sophistry," says Bentham, "is a hydra which if all the necks could be exposed the force would be destroyed." *The Book of Fallacies* has as its purpose to expose those necks by exposing the language strategems which repress reason and purposely cause confusion, strategems like name calling, innuendo, appeal to authority, appeal to caution.

And behind these strategems lurks a tyrant, a despot, a man disposed to get what he wants by hidden persuasion. Big Brother of the mind.

> The mischief common to all these ways of thinking and arguing (which in truth, as we have seen, are but one and the same method couched in different forms of words) is their serving as a cloke [sic] and pretence and ailment to

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> despotism in practice, a despotism, however, in disposition, which is but too apt when pretence and power offer to show itself in practice.

The above passage is from Bentham's Introduction to *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* first published in 1789. But when Orwell speaks of swindles and perversions in the 1940s, he is attacking the impostor terms, the vague generalities, the sham distinctions, the pretenses and corruptions of language which Bentham was suspicious of in the 1780s. But Bentham's hope is that it will be possible to correct men's "clokes" and habits." Bentham's distinction between neutral terms and what he calls "eulogistic" and "dyslogistic" terms are supposed to make us cautious as well as fair in our judgment of men and institutions. "Eulogistic terms are laudatory; dyslogistic terms are vituperative." All we need do is take account of the neutral. Everything is set out for us.

> In speaking of the conduct, behavior, intention, motive or disposition of this or that man, if he is one who is indifferent to you and if you care not whether he is ill or well thought of, you will employ a neutral term. If he is a man whom you wish to recommend to favor, especially a man of your own party, you will employ the eulogistic term . . . But if he is a man whom it is your aim to consign to aversion or contempt, you will employ the dyslogistic term.

Words like *lust, avarice, luxury* are dyslogistic.

Here is a sample of dyslogistic prose from *1984:*

> As usual the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the enemy of the people, had flashed into the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience . . . Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once, long ago (how long ago nobody quite remembered) had been one of the leading figures of the party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself; and then had engaged in counterrevolutionary activities. . . . He was the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the party's purity. All subsequent crimes against the party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching.

For Winston there are no longer neutral terms by which a thinking person may judge his honesty or the honesty of what others teach him. Even the term "neutral" will have to go, when "free" comes to mean only free of lice. The meaning of *neutral* is no longer *neutral* but *denatured.* And this conscious manipulation of men's minds by the application of eulogistic or dyslogistic terms to a man or institution, this conscious application of euphemism (a variety of the eulogistic plus "tarning"*), this conscious application of acronyms (a variety of neutralizing by reducing the picture of an institution or person)—all this conscious manipulation suggests (in Susan Sontag's words) that "semantic change seems not to be an unconscious affair, that it may be rather a matter of habits getting established precisely because one group is trying to establish them."

What we have at last is the emotive, rampant, and then a new realm, neither cognitive nor emotive . . . denatured.

I believe that the teacher should begin Part I of *1984* with the usual convergent questions: Who is Winston? What does he look like? Where does he live? And then move to: Is it possible to find Winston attractive despite his varicose veins? And then move to investigating terms like Euphemism, Acronym, Paradox.

What is the book about so far? It's about a rebel.

What does it say? A man can be a rebel in his mind, if not his body.

But language is the tyrant, language that blinds and deafens the senses to reality. Behind these lies, these inventions, lurks a Big Brother or an organization that desires semantic change to be a conscious effort at first, then less conscious, then unconscious.

We have come upon Doublethink.

In a world where violence has become the answer to lack of power, to loss of it, George Orwell's *1984* is a book that must be taught not only as anti-utopia or science fiction, the usual categories under which the book receives recognition, but as a book about language and power, language as a means of survival, language as a weapon to combat injustice and the feeling of injustice. Orwell's book must be taught virtually page by page for what it says about language and the power of grammar and syntax to dull minds and make thought impossible. It must be taught page by page to show that power over others as an end in itself is becoming increasingly attractive to men and women of little conscience; and to teach that the weapon against the tyranny, first of the bureaucrats, then of the cultists, the highjackers and the juntas, is the power to understand that two plus two does not equal five.

Orwell's *1984* has genius, not art.

—Florence Lewis

*Tarning—Owen Barfield's word. See his masterful "Poetic Diction and Legal Fiction" in *The Importance of Language,* Ed. Max Black. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963.)

Gray Eminence

At 80, Glenway Wescott is completing his autobiographical sketchbooks and thinking about his past. He is indeed one of the last surviving expatriate writers who lived and wrote in Europe during the Twenties; with Hemingway and Dos Passos from Illinois, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis from Minnesota, and Ezra Pound from Idaho, Wescott exiled himself from the Midwest and sought a literary life. Yet it is incorrect and misleading to regard Wescott as a member of the Lost Generation or to place his work in that genre. He did not belong to the Paris coterie-literature. In *Good-Bye Wisconsin,* the book most often associated with his expatriate years, he sees himself and others writers as "a sort of vagrant chosen people like the Jews." Fitzgerald, in *This Side of Paradise,* announced his manifesto, "a new generation . . . dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success, has grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken." But Wescott, in an essay entitled, "Fiction Writing in a Time of Troubles," put it differently: "World War I, which was hideously destructive in reality—it slaughtered a generation, shook the foundations of the world, loosed the whirlwind, weakened important governments, brought on revolution—did not change things in the spirit and in creative and philosophical orientation as much as you might think."

However, in the same essay Wescott talks about the "blessed places of expatriation," the countries of England, the hill towns of Italy and the south of France where "we took happiness for granted; which played us false in due course."

Nowadays, Wescott receives calls and letters almost daily, asking him to assist with information for theses and literary articles. "Now that Henry

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[Miller] is dead, I guess that I am one of the last of that group." The only other major literary figures still alive from that era are Malcolm Cowley and Archibald MacLeish. Wescott does not communicate with them. In his beautiful stone farmhouse in southern New Jersey, Wescott says rather peevishly, "I'm doing my own damnedest to recall all those situations." Editors do not call upon him anymore; publishing companies do not send him books.

Wescott was born in 1901 in Kewashum, Wisconsin, the son of a poor farmer. At 16 he entered the University of Chicago, where his teachers recognized his literary talents. ("I soon became a failed poet," he says.) While at the university he edited the poetry journal, but because of illness, was not able to complete his degree. He admits to the influence of Whitman in his early writing and recalls his first experiences with homosexuality, a theme that would enter his writing and dominate much of his personal life.

In 1923, he wrote what he calls "a long short story," entitled "Bad Hand." It was published in *Dial* magazine and "It gave me overnight recognition." In 1924, Dial Press published Wescott's *The Apple of the Eye,* a collection of short stories. Also in the 1920s, Sherwood Anderson had written *Winesburg Ohio,* and Sinclair Lewis wrote *Main Street* and *Babbitt,* yet Wescott's stories about Wisconsin are seldom compared to Anderson's and Lewis' critiques of small-town America. If future scholars want to place Wescott in a literary constellation of generational writers, they might discover that his work fits with theirs. The influence of Van Wyck Brooks' *Letters and Leadership* can be seen everywhere in the pessimistic literature of these midwestern writers; Anderson, Lewis, and Wescott seem to share his vision of America as a shabby and burnt-out nation, taken over by brutish industrialists and insensitive officials. Certainly, Wescott shares Dos Passos' and Fitzgerald's dislike for the puritanism and narrowness of his midwestern upbringing, and what Fitzgerald called a "reaction against the fathers."

After traveling to Europe, Wescott completed *The Grandmothers: A Family Portrait,* in 1926. "I wrote this book in eighteen days in southern France and I used no notes whatsoever," he told me. He followed this with *Good-Bye Wisconsin* in 1928 and *The Babe's Bed* in 1930.

The four books in the Wisconsin series established his reputation. The narrator of each is Alwyn Tower, who is certainly Wescott. "My books were totally autobiographical. I think I invented only one character and the rest of them were my relatives, friends and enemies." Each of the Wisconsin books is chock full of detail and narrative description. In *The Grandmothers,* he described a sofa: "Beneath the platerack stood a couch, upholstered in rows of yellow tapestry biscuits with a green button at each intersection of the crevices . . ." In the same book, he depicts the fields: "Thousands of telephones poles making the sound of a tuning fork . . . reapers, cultivators, sowers, tedders and racks, creeping like spiders over the slopes . . ." The Wisconsin stories present family history, geographical explanations, essays on American history, a host of personal incidents and the psychological nuances that pertain to love, sexuality and violence. By our present definition, Wescott's books constitute what is called "social history."

Wescott believes that the principle motivation behind his writing is "an understanding of fear." He feared his father, the bad German boys and, he says, "I became aware of my fears, partly because of my own sexual proclivities."

All of the Wisconsin autobiographical novels are now out-of-print. James Korges, writing in *Contemporary Novelists,* feels that "in the not too distant future, Wescott's prose fiction will again be in print so that it can take its place as one of the truly distinguished achievements in twentieth century literature in English."

Recalling one of the incidents associated with the Lost Generation writers, Wescott opened a copy of *The Crack-up,* edited by Edmund Wilson, a book of essays, letters and stories dealing with F. Scott Fitzgerald. Wescott chuckled as he read from the piece he had written: "Fitzgerald had taken me aside on the beach in southern France to encourage me to assist Ernest Hemingway in gaining some literary attention . . . What could I do to help launch Hemingway's career? Why didn't I write a laudatory essay on him?" Wescott filled in some details and returned to reading the article. "I have a sharp tongue and my acquaintances often underestimate my good nature. . . . It simply had not occurred to [Fitzgerald] that unfriendliness or pettiness on my part might inhibit my enthusiasm about the art of a new colleague and rival."

He remembers that he did not "get on too well with Gertrude and Leo Stein." He remembers that Alice B. Toklas "absolutely hated me." While not feeling a close affinity to the Lost Generation, he feels that the entire generation was important and glowing with literary genius. "My God, it was the best of all possible worlds for literature. Yeats is, in my estimation, the best lyrical poet who ever lived." He wishes that James Joyce had not done so much destruction to the English language, but regards Joyce as one of the most creative writers of his generation.

Wescott returned to America in the mid-twenties and began a long and distinguished career as a literary critic and writer. In 1927, he was awarded the Harper Literary Award and completed two books of verse: *The Bittern: A Book of Twelve Poems* and *Natives of Rock: XX Poems.* He began his long scholarly study of Somerset Maugham and other writers.

His next major fiction work, and the only one of his novels still in print, is *The Pilgrim Hawk: A Love Story,* published in 1940. The narrator is again Alwyn Tower and the love story is set in France. Wescott begins the novel: "In the twenties it was not unusual to meet foreigners in some country as foreign to them as to you; your peregrination just crossing theirs; and you did your best to know them in an afternoon or so; and perhaps called the little lightning knowledge, friendship." *The Pilgrim Hawk* depicts the war and peace that goes on in the psyche. The main characters in the book, an Irish couple, have a pilgrim hawk, whose captivity and freedom symbolized, for Wescott, the fear of "possessive and violent love." This short novel is often compared with Faulkner's *The Bear* and Katherine Anne Porter's *Noon Wine.* In fact, Wescott admits that he got the idea of the hawk from his friend Katherine Anne Porter. "She informed me that the hawk is noble because it has to hunt for living food in order to live."

Wescott's only non-autobiographical

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novel is *Apartment in Athens* (1945). But even this novel is a true story, given to Wescott by a member of the World War II Greek underground. The patriot was introduced to Wescott by Mrs. Astor, who had been involved in the Greek war relief movement. Edmund Wilson credits the novel for its "carefully constructed plot": A family, named Helianos, are the major characters and the story depicts the Nazi occupation of Greece. The novel explores the psychology of conqueror and conquered and again explicates Wescott's notions regarding freedom and captivity. Wescott, never much given to political statements or references, depicts the pro-Nazi Metaxas officials of Greece as reactionaries filled with platitudes and self-aggrandizement. In a review of the novel, Wilson says: "Mr. Wescott's novel compels us to share, in a way that is at once fascinating and painful, the constrained and suffocated life of a little city apartment in the first months after the Greek defeat." While he feels that Wescott's conclusion lacks the force presented in the rest of the novel, he concludes his review: "We do need the Glenway Wescotts to tell us what is going on inside ourselves and the Nazis."

Whatever the final judgments may be about Wescott and his work, they will have to include an understanding of writers he admires. Of contemporary writers, he says, "Walker Percy is from my family of writers." He likes writers in search of the "usable past." He asserts that Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools* "may be the best novel written in my generation." In his *Images of Truth*, he includes a chapter on Porter, and during my interview with Wescott, shortly before Porter's death on September 19, 1981, Wescott discussed their friendship and disagreements. (Wescott remarks about female writers in general: "For the most part those who have done the contributing have been spinsters, nuns, courtesans, invalids—a little exempt from the more distracting, exhausting aspects of womanhood as such.")

In his 1950 essay on Maugham, in *Images of Truth*, he is fascinated with the man who was once "the dean of novelists writing in English." Apart from some of the stylistic shortcomings of *Of Human Bondage* and other Maugham works, the essence of Wescott's admiration for Maugham resides in the fact that Maugham dedicated his life to writing and the literary world.

Two essays about Colette appear in *Images of Truth*. Wescott selects *Claudine* to explain a triangularity in a marriage involving "some measure of homosexual responsiveness between Claudine and Rezi." He likes Colette's writing because it is "not cynical or squalid," and he associates her with his friend, Cocteau.

The final chapter in *Images of Truth* is about Thorton Wilder, a writer often mentioned with the Lost Generation. In fact, Wescott met Wilder in 1928 in Ville-franche-sur-Mer. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* had just won Wilder a Pulitzer Prize. Wescott, who likes Wilder's earlier work, *The Cabala*, regards Wilder's youthful friendship as an important part of his early literary life, but Wescott reflects in his essay on Wilder: "Oh, the fatuousness of that time of life, when one considers oneself a made man, a self-made man!"

Wescott uses Wilder's *The Ides of March* as an example of narrative writing at its very best, and feels a confraternity with Wilder as they battle against the "decline of the traditional forms of fiction" and the modern novels of Joyce and Kafka which Wescott characterizes as "the immense dark eclectic self-conscious argumentative modern wind." Wescott blames modern journalism for "a worse impact on the art of the novel than any of the sciences." He blames the economics of writing and publishing for part of the decline in the art of novel writing and, while approving of the improved status of the novelist and writer as "pleasant and salubrious," Wescott feels that this recognition develops "merits and moderations that are irrelevant to our calling." He concludes the essay on Wilder by accounting for his use of dramaturgy as a means of expression. "We dance in his dream, throughout; it is active and bright. It is an art on the side of Apollo, though ever respectful of Dionysus."

Students researching Wescott's literature, commentary and life will discover his close association with Alfred Kinsey. He was invited to the Institute of Sex Research to "improve the library in essential books about homosexuality and sexuality in general," recalls Wescott. Kinsey also communicated with Wescott's life-long friend, Monroe Wheeler, director of exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art, to assist him in meeting creative people such as Paul Saint-Gaudens (who wrote to Kinsey: "My general theory is that all creativity is bound up in one parcel and that sex is part of it"). Recalling a night in 1949, during a conversation about erotic art, Wescott wrote, "Kinsey lifted me out of myself and made me feel, for the first time, a part of a whole. He taught me how to get away from a preoccupation with individual cases." While Wescott disagreed with some of Kinsey's theory, he admired his determination to go farther in his work than anyone had done before. "The problem with understanding sexuality through literature, is that it takes a long time to read it and a long time to write and explain it." Wescott promises that his autobiographical books will disclose more about his own homosexual life and in his 20 volumes of collected materials, he says, "I've got stories to tell that will raise some eyebrows."

Wescott now refers to himself as a gray eminence. He was President of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1958-1961); in 1963, Rutgers University conferred the Doctor of Letters degree. It is difficult to estimate when, and even if, his Wisconsin books may again be in print and read regularly, for there are those even among his own literary generation—such as Malcolm Cowley—who disregard him and even belittle his contribution as a writer.

Wescott's health is delicate, but his mind is still active and his wit razor-sharp. What Wescott has written and written about tells us something of his temperament and style. "I'm reading books and materials that remind me of my past," he told me as he presented carefully inscribed files. He still writes with an ink-filled fountain pen. Edmund Wilson once commented on Wescott's handwriting: "It looks somewhat like the elegant and rigorous script that one finds cut on the copper of sundials of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . ." Whether he is accounted for in his literary life or simply in literary history, Wescott will not be forgotten. "I've already decided what I want on my tombstone," Wescott said . . . " 'He bit off more than he could chew.' "

—Terence M. Ripmaster

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Communiqué from the Academy of Projectors

Mind-set is much too firm and decisive a term for what afflicts us, implying, as it does, at least some spine of rigor in our cheerful ignorance. What, me worry?

Our misapprehensions are vaguer and softer, more a matter of confusion and limited imagination than of any clear choice which could be honestly called a mistake. I am thinking of the fact that all of us engaged in the literary life—and I mean *all,* writers and publishers and agents, critics and scholars and teachers and students—are somehow trying to live in another (earlier) age than our own. It is almost as if Swift had invented us for the sake of the Third Book of *Gulliver's Travels,* then put our eyes in the back of our heads and placed us, one and all, in the Academy of Projectors. Where our follies and misconceptions might yet serve to prove some point or other. One point which could be made—a consensus, be it ever so mighty and widely held, that the world is flat will not allow so much as one true believer to fall, ass over teakettle, off the edge of the world and into outer space.

You would think that at least the writers would know better. After all, imagination is their stock and trade. Maybe imagination is the problem. They are all so busy imagining other (post-modernist) worlds that they are unable to see the real and present one, the one that stubs toes and barks shins and has banana peels to slip on and Whoopee Cushions to sit on. . . .

What I am saying is that the world most of us believe we live in has changed so much, and so quickly, that it might as well be described as having completely vanished. I am saying that all of us are pretending to live a full generation earlier than now. It may be that this fallacy is inherent to literary life and activity (more so in a world of gradually diminishing literacy), that the main thrust of the literary imagination is deeply reactionary. Possible, though tricky to argue. More likely is a corollary notion that for about the last hundred years or so, it has been a salient characteristic of the modern and post-modern literary consciousness to believe, mistakenly, that one is living in the previous generation.

Out of this basic mistake arise some fascinating distortions and plenty of trouble, too. Henry James lived and died trying to live and to succeed in the Age of Charles Dickens. The great generation of masters here—Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Steinbeck, etc.—imagined themselves to be contemporary with Tolstoy and James and so forth. In poetry Eliot was measuring himself against Tennyson. Williams and Wallace Stevens looked at Whitman and felt somehow diminished. And so on. (Do you know who Frost *really* wanted to be? You'll never believe it. Edwin Markham. No, not really. What he wanted, and said so, too, was to have written "The Man with a Hoe.") These people could not, for the life of them, figure out what was going wrong. Talk about Dissociation of Sensibility! Maybe that was it. It wasn't something that happened to literary consciousness after Donne and the Metaphysicals bought the farm. Instead it was, pure and simple, a common characteristic of the modern literary sensibility, something that happened between the high time of Dickens and the maturity of Henry James.

As Fortune or Providence would have it the first generation of twentieth century masters (and thus we, too, with them) were deeply deceived when, immediately following World War II, they were all "discovered." Along with Henry James, too, if you happen to remember the time. They were lumped together and then declared to have been old-fashioned masters all along. And everybody except Fitzgerald, who was as dead and as cold as a key before anybody bothered to rediscover him, profited greatly from this drastic revision. These Old Masters, happy if still somewhat confused, believed they had been right all along, that there *was* continuity in literary history, that they had legitimately inherited the estate that had belonged once to their honored predecessors. Further, they had no reason not to imagine that, all in due time, Justice would be done. Now that we know what Justice is all about, we can believe it, too. I remember Stanley Kunitz solemnly informing me that if Robert Frost appeared now, he wouldn't have to wait twenty years to be published. Do you see what I mean? It's not the sweetness and worldly wisdom of that notion that interests me one way or the other. What is absolutely fascinating is the idea *(surreal,* at the very least) that a Robert Frost might come along in our time. . . .

Well, it's thirty years later than that, thirty busy and changing years. And what do we see? We see critics doing their damnedest to find or create "masters," cut out from among the herd of us, so that they can be described and dealt with in the same terms as were their fathers and grandfathers. This wholly irrational effort has been given some authority by one of the greatest changes which took place in the last thirty years—the institutionalization of contemporary literature. (And Creative Writing also.) As those of us who fought to bring twentieth century literature into the academic curriculum were warned by our own boring and gray elders, to teach literature in the terms, old-fashioned terms, that academic institutions are designed to allow, you have to make arbitrary choices, create hierarchies, name trends, celebrate those masters who, by consensus, are worthy of consideration. As soon as living literature found a home in the colleges, we were in bad trouble.

I am not going to begin or to advance my arguments by means of statistics. People tend to argue back about the numbers and then blithely to ignore the general propositions.

Even without the clothing of numbers, it is sure and certain to say that now, in 1982, what we think of and call "literature" is no more than a teeny-tiny part of the commercial publishing business in America. In all fairness it should also be understood that all commercial publishing put together is a teeny-tiny business. And not a very profitable one. In fact, the only people who can safely be de-

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scribed as making a living out of the whole publishing enterprise are the hired help, that is the people who, one way and another, work for publishing companies. (I here include literary journalists and book reviewers as, essentially, the hired help of the publishing industry.)

The publication of serious literature has gradually become what it is today—a negligible part of a relatively unimportant business with limited growth potential. Commercial publishing companies, as such, are vanishing from the scene except as small parts of the large and complex conglomerate businesses which are swallowing them whole. Now, if you listen, you will soon hear a certain number of modestly prominent writers (who may be considered the "house servants" of the publishing plantation, the rest of us clearly being "field hands") complaining about the mergers of old-line commercial publishing houses into conglomerate structures. They are quite right to moan; it isn't likely to do them any good at all. As for the rest of us—well, it isn't likely to do us (that is, the vast majority of people who work seriously at the making of serious literature in all its various forms) any more harm than the unmerged, independent commercial publishers have already done. I can't think of any good reason to feel sad that certain writers must soon pull weeds and chop cotton with the rest of us.

Never mind. There is an audience, too small and too limited to mean much of anything to commercial publishers any more, but adequate to justify the attention of a modest number of quarterlies and university presses and an astonishing proliferation of small presses and little magazines.

Herewith, then, our first bold conclusion. In the present, *right now*, serious literature has ceased to be of any importance to commercial publishers. And commercial publishers have next to no importance in the dissemination of serious literature. Serious literature is almost completely in the hands of the aforesaid quarterlies and university presses, the little magazines and small presses. This situation is actual, here and now, not potential.

Someone steps forward and challenges me by citing the widely-publicized National Poetry Series. To which I reply first, that the National Poetry Series has had a *diminishing effect* on the publication of poetry by commercial publishers. Those involved appear to be publishing less poetry than they did before the Series came along. In any case, the National Poetry Series, so far, has all the signs, the tailfeathers as it were, to lead an objective and even hopeful observer (myself) to conclude that it is yet another Big Apple Scam, already reeking of hints of corruption, clues of cronyism. It looks like a rip-off from the word go.

Who cares if it is or it isn't?

Even if it and the people involved are as honest as the day is long (I write this from Maine in January), the National Poetry Series has had a negligible effect on American poetry. It offers nothing except for the few who profit from it.

Since the last home for serious writing in America is, essentially, the institutional media of universities and the amateur milieu of little magazines and small presses, it is their virtues and vices we should be studying, thinking about, talking about.

And, by the way, it is useless to cite the exceptions to the rule—your Updike and your Mailer, your Malamud and Roth and Vonnegut, etc. These are not even really exceptions which make the rule. I have already named them as "house niggers." As such, they may be replaced when they die or drift into silence and senility. But they do not point the way for anyone else to follow after. They don't seem very interested in anyone else. They are settlers, one and all, not a pioneer in the bunch. It was the previous generation which blazed trails.

These artists, good or bad or merely mediocre, no matter, are useful to their commercial publisher as a kind of advertising or, anyway, conspicuous consumption.

Think of them as expensive sportscars with exotic names. To be driven on back country lanes, as a respite from real work. . . .

Very well.

Institutional and small presses.

To begin again.

In favor of the little magazine and small presses (hereinafter let this include the *institutional* quarterlies and presses unless otherwise indicated), let it be said that they are publishing some excellent work by excellent writers. The quality of the work of little magazines and small presses is inevitably uneven. But, seriously, I have never seen a little magazine, be it ever so crudely mimeographed and humble, that did not contain at least some first rate work. One reason for this is, of course, the huge and growing logjam of good poetry and fiction out there waiting to find a place to be published. Yet that does not explain why there is almost always good writing in the little magazines and why the level of writing there is, in general, superior to the level and quality of writing to be found in the slowly dying "commercial" magazines like *Harper's* and *Atlantic*. Of all the commercial magazines left in America only *The New Yorker*—and once in a while a place like *Redbook*—publishes enough excellent material to qualify as being seriously concerned with literature. And, month after month, quarter after quarter, there are any number of little magazines and quarterlies which publish uniformly more interesting and better written material than *The New Yorker*.

You have to exercise a little imagination and some cold and hard objectivity to see this. And then to believe it. Especially if you are a *writer*. Because they pay so well. And the paper is so slick. And the advertisements are so . . . chic. And the reputation is wonderful and the company is grand and the cartoons (!) are worth the price. But, still, there are any number of quarterlies and literary magazines which publish better poetry and fiction. I think *The New Yorker*, with it splendid stable of nonfiction writers, gets the edge in that department.

Very well. Little magazines and small presses now publish the greater part of the literary work of good quality that is published in this, our country. That's just a fact.

What else is in their favor?

One thing, an important one, is that because they are well-scattered all across the country they have already changed the national literary culture. In this sense: For the first half of this century New York City tried its best to be the national capital of our national literary culture. For a while it looked like it might work. As long as the commercial publishers and magazines offered anything at all to makers of literature, it was at least possible that New York might become and remain the capital of liter-

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ary culture. But by now the power of New York has greatly diminished. Although the critical Establishment there retains the power to do harm—they can, for instance, as they do, simply ignore the majority of books and things published outside of the commercial arena—they no longer possess the power to do good. The ability to punish, taken in abstraction from the capacity to *reward,* is no kind of power at all. Stick without carrot is meaningless.

Am I exaggerating? Take a look at the Winter '81 issue of *The Michigan Quarterly* wherein no less prominent a figure than Arthur Miller announces, quite simply, the death of Broadway and the end of the preëminence of New York theater—*as far as drama* (read: serious literature) is concerned. He says that writing for theater is no longer a profession, but a vocation and a labor of love. You can go to Broadway for a musical. But if you want to see a play, a drama, you must go most anywhere in the nation (including Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway, etc.). Same thing all over, then.

New York is suddenly only another region among many. Little magazines and small presses are helping this process along. A process which may be viewed by the Establishment as, at best, degenerative. But out in the Boonies, where the most of us live and write and publish, it is an exciting and creative time, not so much a beginning as a return to an earlier, perhaps simpler time in our literary history.

Actually, in terms of that history, the very idea of a national cultural center and Establishment, an élite destined to preside over this huge, wonderfully various and pluralistic country, was an aberration.

Of course, under the new dispensation (as Arthur Miller pointed out in terms of playwriting) there won't be, can't be the rewards of money and fame that used to keep certain types of people plugging away at typewriters. American writers still had some of these common worldly aspirations a generation or so ago. Now? Well, a year or so back, Kurt Vonnegut (with characteristic veils of irony) told a writers' conference audience that he may very well be "the last major American novelist." By which I believe he meant that those *terms* no longer have meaning. To which I would only add what I said to start with—that the writers of a generation or so ago, who had some hopes and some of whose hopes seemed to be realized, were fooling themselves. The estates of Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, etc., taken all together, add up to less than the capital inheritance offered by the average chief executive officer of any one of the *Fortune* 500. Only O'Hara left an executive-style estate behind him.

What does that mean? That, in truth, serious writing, even at its most successful, wasn't really a *professional* enterprise. That nothing has changed that much. Our patina of self-deception and self-delusion is a little thinner, that's all.

Since little magazines and small presses are where you find writing of serious quality in America today, it behooves us to consider some of the possibly negative aspects of the situation.

We should begin by understanding that with little magazines and small presses now in the driver's seat, they have replaced the commercial publishers as the writer's natural adversary. That is, though both may think of themselves still as allies against the larger (and now largely mythical) commercial powers, the little magazines and small presses are now between the writer and the audience.

If the writers are literal amateurs, then so also are most of the people who edit, manage, run the little magazines and small presses. And, great chain of being and all that, they in turn depend upon a base of volunteers to help them and are, likewise dependent upon some source or sources of wealth to keep the system funded and working. This wealth may be personal or institutional. Sometimes it has been government wealth. Sometimes it has been a combination of all three. What is generally important is not the precise source of wealth, but rather the acknowledgement and understanding *(where your treasure is, there is your heart also . . .)* that there has to be *something* in it for the source of wealth. Obviously this something cannot be the earning back of more money on an initial investment. Wealth is being spent not to increase itself, but not for purposes of self-destruction either.

Some piper plays the tune and all dance.

There is a perfectly commonplace and comprehensible desire on the part of everyone concerned to have something to show for all this effort and expense. What all are seeking then is at least full credit (name and reputation) for good works. Which desire naturally and inevitably leads to their supporting of a kind of consensual hierarchy of reputable writers and of known, acceptable values. Thus, these days, very few little magazines and small presses can be credited with much . . . discovery. Once upon a time, discovery was their chief enterprise and reason for being. Now that they are the power structure there is less value for them in discovering and developing new talent except in the same very modest way that commercial publishers, in fact feeding on the labor of little magazines and small presses, used to claim an occasional discovery.

What I'm saying is that now that the little magazines and small presses are the literary status quo, a large part of their effort is, and will be increasingly, to support and maintain the status quo. Much less energy is devoted to innovation except insofar as they gain credit and repute for being innovative.

To have a good name they must deal primarily with the commodity of good names.

Amateurism. . . .

Amateurs demand the rights and privileges of being of amateur status.

Amateur status, of course, allows for a very high level of inefficiency. Permits, indeed insists on, a certain classy slovenliness, a cultivated carelessness, an indifference to the needs, the hopes and fears of writers. In these things, however, they are not discernibly different from the professionals who once ruled the roost and who had no good excuse for their vices. Amateurs are proving no more abusive than professionals, yet they do have their amateurism as a final cop-out when caught in the act.

Amateur editors tend to like to "work with authors." Not since Maxwell Perkins (and more myth than substance there, in my opinion) have commercial editors had time for this sort of thing. A lot of the powerful amateurs not only want to work with authors, but also wish to *know* authors. Personally. Since it is all so small scale, why not? It can all be very chummy. It can easily cease to be an impersonal transaction between amiable adversaries. It can become, as to

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an extent it already is, a kind of socializing.

Once again this emphasis on the social and personal relationship between editor and author tends to lead away from the goal of discovery. Who wants to socialize with unknowns when there are so many reputable writers, tried and true, to work with? Thus *recognition*, in whatever terms, is just as important as it was when publishing was commerce. Thus discovery or rediscovery are just as unlikely now as then. Amateurs have trouble trusting their own judgment.

Thus, in part as a result of their amateurism, the little magazines and small presses are steadily becoming more and more committed to the preservation of the literary status quo. Daily they seem to be more and more conservative. Maybe not in an outward and visible sense, but certainly inwardly and spiritually.

Thus even as the role of little magazines and small presses is expanding, there is also a strong reductive force at work. It is easy to get the impression that a very small number of serious writers (just like the old days) dominates the literary scene. And in that sense the little magazines and small presses are not accurately reflecting the richness and variety and complexity of contemporary literature.

Thus the little magazines and small presses are not yet doing their job. Success (by default) and survival (by walking small) are partly to blame for this. Amateurism, which encourages a certain self-satisfaction, is not helping the people who are involved to recognize their inadequacies, to admit there is a job to be done which they are not yet doing well.

Ah, but there is more to it. There always is.

Even if all creatures great and small who are involved in little magazines and small presses were people of strict self-scrutiny, rectitude and perfect integrity, even if those involved with quarterlies and university presses felt no sense of primary (if often unspoken) obligation to bring honor, credit, good report and repute to the institutions which they serve and which serve them; even if the people who administer little magazines and small presses acted with impeccable and blithe disregard of the sources of the funds (their own or other people's wealth) which allow them to act at all; even if the motives for all these people were not in any way social or political or therapeutic or simply self-serving, even if their many mixed motives could be reduced and converted into the simple wish to serve, humbly, as servants and, yes, handmaidens to the art of literature; even so, there are other powerful forces working against innovation, discovery, adventure, risk, the search for what is truly original in form and content.

One of these is simply the sheer weight and number of manuscripts moving like some vast, insane storm track, an implacable blizzard of paper, back and forth across the huge land. Moving and landing, day after day after day, like some enormous cargo of unwanted surplus, some utterly inessential and probably anachronistic commodity, upon the desks and tables and floors of all the little magazines and small presses.

Twenty years ago, when I was doing some editing for *The Transatlantic Review*, I figured I had about a minute, maybe a minute and a half, to judge whether a manuscript was worth . . . coming back to, *actually reading*. I am sure, I *know*, it is a lot worse now. Almost all of any reader's or editor's time is spent rejecting things. The truth is—though precious few editors admit it, least of all to themselves—that we spend practically no time at all *looking for quality;* and virtually all of our time and effort is devoted to looking for signs and clues which will allow us to reject things quickly and efficiently. Not that that makes any real difference. The important part is that, whether we pretend we are looking for high quality or for reasons to object, either way what we are really looking for is the presence or absence of known, accepted, easily and quickly recognizable characteristics. More of the same old things.

Editors look for names, of course, names they know or know of and respect. Then they look, very quickly, for common characteristics which (no matter what the editors may think) are simply characteristics they have already seen before somewhere, *things* they know or know of and respect.

And thus, by and through methodology, in and of itself, all power is aligned against anything that is genuinely new and different or unusual or highly individual in form or content. Hundreds and hundreds of little magazines serving thousands (and more thousands coming from the institutional creative writing programs which besides giving clients technical assistance and time to write, also, of course, work to promulgate and maintain the accepted and respectable values of the literary Establishment) of writers in an enormous and culturally diverse nation, end up not reflecting the rich and complex character of that nation, but rather a handful of artistic criteria and "ideas," none of these with more weight or dimension, say, than commercial slogans or bumper stickers.

What saves us one and all from sounding like mere country cousins is the fact that a fair number of editors are so removed from the hot, bright, technicolor center of things, or are so unsophisticated, that they don't know any better.

Ignorance may be the most positive force for creativity in America today.

Form and content. . . .

Because of all of the above, everything mentioned or implied so far, the relation of form to *fashion* has (as far as I can tell) never been closer in my lifetime. Just as in the rest of our society, we have poetry and fiction coming to us from *constituencies* and *special interest groups* as much as from individuals. Critical reactions are therefore as reflexive—"Pavlovian" could be the word—as are editorial ones. And at the other end of the scale, among the writers, the sharecroppers who actually produce the stuff, it wouldn't occur to most of them to try to create anything outside of the instantly recognizable existing guidelines of what is *good*.

You can hardly blame living writers for wanting to see their work published somewhere. Most of them know (more or less) what editors look for and how they look for it. Most of them (even with a perfect contempt for it . . . sometimes) try at least to keep up with the prevailing fashions. Look, they don't want to be copy cats, and they do a lot of very fine tuning to establish that they are "different" from everybody else exactly like them. But most of them aren't perverse or self-destructive either.

In the creative writing biz it's publish or perish whether you work for an institution or not.

How about originality, risk, innovation within the terms of a writer's own work? That is, assuming a writer

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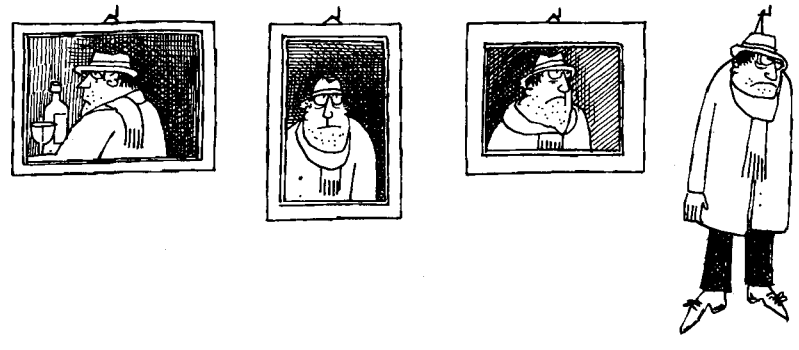
earns a good name for some recognizable quality in his or her work, supposing a given writer discovers or is assigned his or her "voice," then what? Is Creeley going suddenly to write long-lined narrative poems like some kind of a California Dickey? No, he's going to cultivate his garden. To do that he doesn't even *think about* anything but Creeley poems. He's innocent, by the way; I just chose his name from among the hundreds because it *sounds* nice. Will Barthelme (another swell-sounding name) turn his verbal skills to the service, say, of some excellent nonfiction work rather like (for example) something by John McPhee? Not bloody likely. And not because Barthelme isn't an honest artist. But mainly because there is no good reason not to continue doing the things he does and thinking the things he does.

If you think similarity of form is a problem (and it is), the problem of content is even worse. More restrictive. Precisely *because* this is true I can't really develop an argument here. I can only mention it and hope for the best.

It is not so much that there are social, political, moral, and philosophical attitudes and *positions* which are utterly unacceptable (i.e., unpublishable); not merely or simply that the attitudes, in general and in amazing specificity as well, of the *avant garde* are essentially the same as those of professional and commercial and institutional groups; that is, not so deep down the little magazine and small presses are (probably thoughtlessly) busily engaged in supporting exactly and precisely the same virtues and values as the Establishment, and likewise condemning the same vices; above and beyond that deplorable situation, they are also (and again without even thinking about it) stifling, by simply ignoring, any inquiry which might question the validity of the intellectual *status quo*. You can be fooled by the fact that intellectuals of the American Establishment tend to argue with each other, just as, say the New York *Times* and the Washington *Post* and the Boston *Globe* may quibble and quarrel a bit, may treat one and the same news story from a different angle. But it would be foolish and untrue to imagine that the American intellectual Establishment (of which the literary culture is a minor and decorative part) is at odds with itself about fundamentals. It holds more truths to be self-evident, both broad and general truths together with enough specifics and even trivial notions to fill a fat book—a sort of intellectual telephone directory of accepted ideas—than you can shake a cudgel or a *tiki* stick at.

It is not just that it is not allowed for anyone in good standing to question any of these assumptions. More to the point it never occurs to anyone to do so.

Some of you who believe that the strength and vitality of a free and democratic people depends upon the free flow of freely diverse ideas, questions and challenges, and who believe that the literature of a free people, above all, ought to represent this *(reflecting* being too passive a role)—some of you may be worried. Well, so am I.



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Speaking of things which are, well, undemocratic:

It should also be pointed out that now that literature is in the hands of amateurs and is produced by vocational writers as a labor of love, poor folks are going to have a hard time getting into the act from now on. For a while the government may well encourage some minority and underclass writers, if only to keep them at typewriters and off the streets. But any real chances of the full range of America's social classes fully participating in our culture (even if they all wanted to) have considerably diminished.

Pretty soon, if present trends keep up, only the rich will be able to afford the hobby of producing or publishing literature.

Now for the happy ending.

Up to now I have done my dead level best to be as Swiftian as possible. But now, being a twentieth century American and a true believer in happy endings, I must bid farewell to old Swift.

The happy, upbeat conclusion, "the beauty part," is this: If what I said in the beginning—that everyone is living in the wrong generation, a past generation, anyway—is true, then the only people who know otherwise are you and I, reader.

Meaning that the little magazines and small presses don't know that they are the power structure and last resort of serious literature. They all (secretly) want to be Doubleday or, anyway, Farrar Straus. And the writers all dream (secretly) of *using* the little magazines and small presses to get ahead, to climb the slippery ladder up to fame and prosperity, never imagining that there isn't any of that left for them.

My cheerful farewell thought is that by the time everyone figures out the truth, it will already be part of the past. And that the future, whatever it may be, will be *(by definition)* different from this present. Therefore, even if I am right about what is happening, it is bound and determined to change. For better or worse.

Meantime you will have to admit that it isn't altogether the dullest time in literary history to be alive. It is not nearly as dull and boring as it might be.

And, who knows?, the Word Processor may yet be the answer to questions we haven't asked yet. Then again. . . . —*George Garrett*

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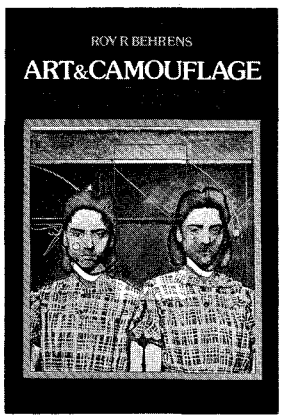

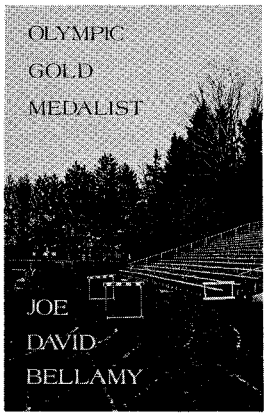

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